

games™

PS3 | Xbox 360 | Revolution | PS2 | GC | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | P

**EXCLUSIVE
UK HANDS ON**

STEP INTO THE LITE

Nintendo releases the first
phase of its master plan
with the revamped DS

180

PAGES OF
HANDHELD
JOY

HIGHLIGHTS

**FIGHT NIGHT
ROUND 3** [360]

**LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER:
LEGEND** [MULTI]

**METAL GEAR SOLID 3:
SUBSISTENCE** [PS2]

STRANGLEHOLD [360]

**MORTAL KOMBAT:
ARMAGEDDON** [MULTI]

REVIEWED

**GHOST RECON:
ADVANCED WARFIGHTER**

Ubisoft's long-awaited war machine

REVIEWED

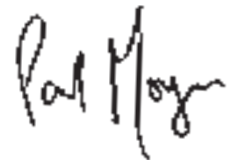
**ONIMUSHA:
DAWN OF DREAMS**

Capcom's killer franchise returns





Welcome to the beginnings of a wonderful relationship. You may have noticed, read or heard about the changes that have been happening in the **games™** corner of the world over the past couple of months – none more so than with the passing of the reins, with Martin moving onto exciting new pastures. I take over, not with a view to simply keep it ticking over with award-winning content and comment, but with a simple premise and promise to you: to take **games™** to the next level, to evolve this magazine we both love, its content and appeal to the single-most important people on the face of this games-playing earth – you, the reader. To this end over the next few months you'll begin to see subtle and more obvious improvements, and with your help, together we can create something special, something unique, and something we can both look back on with pride. So this is the time to speak up and let your voice be heard by emailing us at the **games™** address. Let the evolution begin... Well, maybe after another game of *Recon*.



Paul Morgan
Editor



1-UP
03920



I-SCORE
04630



CONTENTS

FEATURES

Nintendo DS Lite 72

"It appeals to a broader audience than more traditional-looking 'games machines'." We chat with Nintendo about the new bitesize DS.

The Players: Sid Meier 78

An audience with the great Sid Meier doesn't come along often... but we managed to get one.

Back To Basics 80

We investigate the reported lethal levels and extremes that gamers will go to for fun.

Community 86

games™ travels to Boston to rock out with *Guitar Hero* development legend Harmonix.

Develop It Yourself Gaming 90

Be responsible for the games you play and design them yourself. We explain how...

The Players: Traveller's Tales 96

We speak to Paul Gardner, creative director of the Oxford Studio about Monkeys, Sega and more.

100 Greatest Retro Games: Part 2 140

So this is it. We've made it to the Top 50. What could possibly be number one? Hmmm...

REGULARS

News 010

Essentials 164

Subscriptions 170

Next Month 172

Contact 174

PREVIEWS

TimeShift	32
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	38
Rogue Trooper	40
LocoRoco	42
Heroes Of Might And Magic Stranglehold	44
Monster Hunter Freedom	46
Top Spin 2	48
Spy Hunter: Nowhere To Run	50
Lostmagic	52
The Da Vinci Code	54
Guild Wars: Factions	56
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	58
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	60
Showcase	62

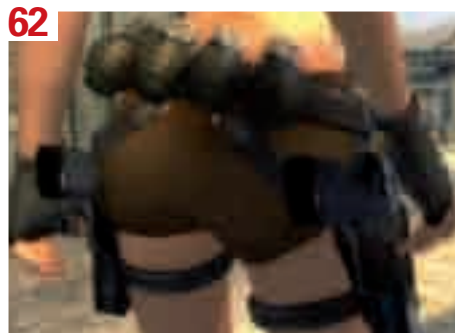
REVIEWS

Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	100
24: The Game	104
Sonic Riders	106
Drakengard 2	107
Driver: Parallel Lines	108
Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII	110
Fight Night Round 3	112
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Essentials	114
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	115
Mega Man: Powered Up	116
Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams	118
Exit	120
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	122
Commandos Strike Force	124
The Outfit	126

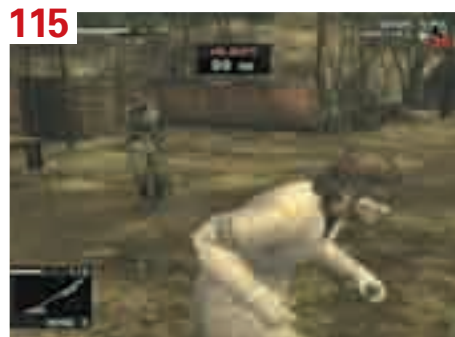
RETRO

News	132
Review: Taito Legends 2	134
Why Don't They Remake...	
<i>Silent Bomber</i>	136
Greatest Retro Game Ever...	
<i>Earthworm Jim</i>	138
The Ultimate Collection	154
Contact	156
Buyers' Guide	158

62



115



138



Ubisoft's much-heralded
sequel arrives on the Xbox 360

100

Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter



NEWS

NEWS | INDUSTRY GOSSIP | OPINION



CONTENTS

FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

12 PS3 PUTDOWN

When will it launch? What will it cost? Find out, in the latest report, which wild accusations and cynical assumptions are doing the rounds regarding Sony's eagerly awaited next-gen console in the latest report.

14 THE MOVIE GAME

Illustrious film director Peter Jackson and the notorious Uwe Boll tell all about what they think next-gen consoles will do for the world of movies and videogaming.

15 GIZMONDO WHO?

While we'd never be so pompous as to say 'we told you so!' we have a little announcement regarding the future of 'that' handheld wonder. Told you so! Sorry.

16 OUT AND ABOUT

PSP owners in Japan can now download game demos while ordering an espresso thanks to a new service launched by Sony. Find out more on p16.

18 IN OTHER NEWS

We have more on the PS3 and piracy, as well as hot news on how the Xbox 360 will affect current-gen game prices. Don't forget we've also squeezed in all the latest industry news...

ACADEMY OF INTERACTIVE ARTS AND SCIENCES HOLDS BIGGEST CEREMONY YET

INTERACTIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Last month, Sony totally dominated the ninth AIAS Interactive Achievement Awards. The event, held annually during the Design, Innovate, Communicate and Entertain (DICE) summit, took place at the famous Hard Rock Hotel, Las Vegas. The awards are considered the most credible in the industry and are voted for by a panel of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' 8,000-odd members.

Although *Resident Evil 4* was noticeably absent from the list of nominees (Capcom being one of only a very few major publishers that isn't a member of the AIAS),

the list of nominations spanned a huge number of different genres, developers and publishers. Sony, however, came out on top, winning an incredible nine awards, seven of which were for *God Of War*. The brutal game coveted prizes for Overall Game Of The Year, Action/Adventure Game Of The Year, Outstanding Character Performance - Male, Outstanding Achievement In Sound Design, Outstanding Achievement In Original Music Composition, Outstanding Achievement In Animation and Console Game Of The Year. Phew! At the same time we can't help but feel just a little sorry for *Shadow Of The Colossus*, though, a superb game nominated in the all same categories as *God Of War*, but tragically jipped on all but two counts.

This year's Hall Of Fame inductee was Richard Garriot (or Lord British as you're more likely to know him), who was also a keynote speaker at the DICE conference along with Reggie Fils-Aime, Peter Molyneux and Will Wright. *Shadow Of The Colossus* creators Kenji Kaido and Fumito Ueda also spoke at the conference that is fast becoming the most important of such events in the American industry.





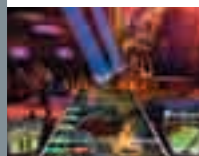
"IT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE YEAR FOR VIDEOGAMES AND THE INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY IS COMMENDED FOR ITS CREATIVE VISION"

JOSEPH OLIN, AIAS PRESIDENT

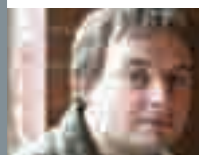
Our much-loved *Guitar Hero* also scooped a number of awards, beating *Nintendogs* to earn the Outstanding Innovation In Gaming award. Rather oddly, *We Love Katamari* also won Children's Game Of The Year, while *Soul Calibur III* brought Namco further success in the Fighting Game Of The Year category.

2005 was one of the most exciting years for gaming in a long time in terms of innovation and

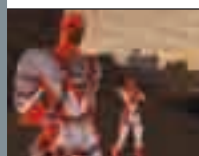
sheer quality. This is a fact amply showcased by the Interactive Achievement Awards' extensive list of nominees and winners. The PlayStation2 especially has seen a number of games that will doubtless be remembered as genuine highlights of this generation. It makes us a little sad that it's coming to an inevitable end – we feel that we're only just beginning to realise the true potential of such amazing machines.



Guitar Hero is likely to repeat its star performance in the UK.



David Jaffe, creator of *God Of War*. Now a very happy man.



We love being supervillains. Just keep looking mean, yes.

THE BIG WINNERS

THE BIGGEST AND MOST SIGNIFICANT WINNERS AT THIS YEAR'S AWARDS...

HARMONIX/ RED OCTANE

Guitar Hero picked up the second most awards this year, taking home the prestigious Outstanding Innovation In Gaming as well as Family Game Of The Year, Outstanding Achievement In Game Design, Outstanding Achievement In Gameplay Engineering (tied with *Nintendogs*) and Outstanding Achievement In Soundtrack. It was also nominated for Game Of The Year and Console Game Of The Year, both won by *God Of War*. *Guitar Hero* is coming to Europe under the Red Octane label in March and we don't see why it shouldn't enjoy similar success in Europe – we're thrilled to see it get the popular and professional recognition that it deserves.



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

Although Sony dominated with *God Of War*, *Shadow Of The Colossus* was also nominated for eight awards. It's bizarre that Outstanding Achievement In Animation should go to *God Of War* when the giants in *Colossus* are the most alive-looking, best-animated 'things' we've ever beheld in a game. Sony also picked up nominations for *Sly 3: Honour Among Thieves* in Best Children's Game and Outstanding Achievement In Story And Character Development. Sony held the most nominations by a large margin, followed by EA.



AND THE REST...

Nintendo dominated in the handheld area, winning Handheld Game Of The Year with *Nintendogs* which also drew with *Guitar Hero* in Outstanding Achievement In Gameplay Engineering. Outstanding Achievement In Online Gameplay was won by *Battlefield 2*. EA also picked up Sports Game Of The Year for *SSX On Tour*, Racing Game Of The Year for *NFS: Most Wanted* and First-Person Action Game Of The Year for *Battlefield 2*. *Jade Empire* picked up RPG Of The Year and Outstanding Achievement In Character Development – Female. NCsoft took MMG Of The Year with *City Of Villains* and *Guild Wars*, which tied for the award. *The Movies* won Sim Of The Year.



Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BLIZZARD OF CONTROVERSY

After recently giving one of its *World Of Warcraft* players an official warning, Blizzard found itself with some very politically correct egg on its face. Sara Andrews was reprimanded for starting an in-game guild that welcomed lesbian, gay and bi-sexual players. Completely misunderstanding the point, Blizzard customer services reprimanded Andrews for a breach of the game's terms of service. She has since received a full apology from Blizzard, that has promised to review its current policies to avoid similar situations in the future.

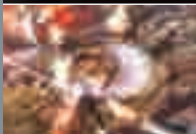


CHECK THIS OUT

Snoop Doggy Dogg shocked the gaming world when he announced the launch of his Hip-Hop Gaming League. The response from journalists was almost as imperceptible as the rapper's remaining talent, but he persevered adding, "I'm an initiator, you dig?" The league is only open to those Snoop considers the elite, so rappers, drug dealers, topless women. He rounded off his tirade of ghetto clichés with, "We want people who hate to lose, like myself. Now marinate on that." If we knew how, Snoop.



Snake's back on PS3 and we can hardly wait.



ANALYSTS CRITICISE PS3

NEW STUDY RILES SONY

Analyst firm Merrill Lynch has published a report that shows distinct shortcomings in Sony's PlayStation3 strategy. As well as evidence to show that the manufacturing cost for each console could be over \$800, the report claims that the PS3 will inevitably be delayed by up to a year. However, although the first of these claims is easily the most worrying, Sony has chosen to focus its rebuttal on the second point of contention, stating that the console is still on track for a spring 2006 release in at least one territory (despite the fact that, at the time of writing, spring 2006 constitutes sometime within the next 4-12 weeks).

Looking at the evidence in the report, though, the quoted \$800 per console looks rather unlikely. Many of the figures quoted were a little dubious, including the \$350 figure for the console's Blu-ray drive. Although \$350 would not be an unreasonable suggestion for a home Blu-ray read-write device, the PlayStation3's drive

is highly likely to be read-only and many of the expensive components of a home device (such as video processing hardware) will already be a fundamental part of the PS3's architecture.

There is also confusion over the \$230 figure for the IBM Cell chip, which the report claims will be very difficult and consequently very expensive to manufacture – despite the fact that IBM senior vice president William Zeittler said that the chip was being manufactured "faster than any chip we've done."

The manufacturing costs, then, may not be anything like as disastrous as the report predicts – the suggestion that the console may not be released for another year is a far more credible statement. As we've already mentioned, Sony spokesperson Kei Sakaguchi has asserted that the firm is still on track for its original release date of spring this year, but this seems exceptionally unlikely given that absolutely no information about price points or marketing efforts has yet been released. In order to stick to a spring 2006 deadline, Sony would have to complete, manufacture, market and launch the console within the next three months from

It's still looking worryingly banana shaped, but E3 may tell a different tale.





DMC3 and MGS4 are two of only a few games confirmed for the PS3.

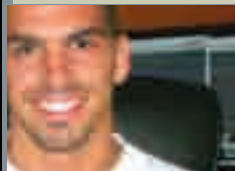
what is currently a standing start.

The most concerning thing about this issue is not the claim that the PS3 may be delayed – this, indeed, has seemed inevitable ever since the date was announced – but the way Sony has responded to that claim. The company insists on standing by its launch date, seemingly refusing to either admit defeat or show any signs of progress with regard to the release. What's worrying is that the firm seems insistent on sticking with what it originally said about the launch (despite the fact that it would now be almost impossible) that nobody, from developers to publishers to media, is prepared to rely on what it says any more. It's terribly damaging for the firm and suggests the sort of arrogance that could well lead to the PlayStation's eventual demise as market leader – which is exactly what Microsoft is relying on. It seems that Sony is going to have to decide what would be more damaging for its new console – an even later start on the Xbox 360, or the sort of overconfidence that could lead to a botched and ineffectual launch.

"SONY'S INSISTENCE THAT THE PS3 WILL LAUNCH THIS SPRING IS THE SORT OF ARROGANCE THAT COULD LEAD TO PLAYSTATION'S EVENTUAL DEMISE AS MARKET LEADER"

ALSO THIS MONTH...

A Sony employee has been dismissed for posting an article on his blog commenting on the PS3 development situation. Josh Robinson, who was a 3D artist at SCEE, compared the machine's abilities to the 360's, saying that, "The consistent comment I am hearing from people is that the Xbox 360 is better." He was also concerned about the growing frustration surrounding the console: "Where is the box? Where is the final system? When is it coming out? No one knows and people are starting to get just a little salty." Josh has defended his right to publish his article, claiming that it did not breach his NDA. "I guess the new rule for me is, don't ever say anything at all about anything. Ever. EVER."



JACK THOMPSON LETTER

CAMPAIGNER REGALES BONO WITH ASSORTED NONSENSE

Jack Thompson just won't go away. games™ has always been supportive of measures to restrict the sale of violent and otherwise inappropriate videogames to minors, but the nonsense this man comes out with does nothing to support that cause. This month, he's written to U2 frontman Bono urging him, "As a fellow brother in Jesus Christ, appreciative of your bold witness to the transforming truth of the Gospel," not to buy Take-Two. Bono is an investor in Elevation Partners, which is rumoured to be interested in acquiring the GTA publisher.

As well as his usual 'Grand Theft Auto is a murder simulator' ranting, Thompson has said that Take-Two's assertions that the recent lawsuits brought against the game were 'without merit', were, "akin to saying that AIDS poses no threat to life." He also produced a great new soundbite about the PS2 DualShock controller claiming that it, "desensitises the user to the act of killing," because it, "sends a visceral jolt back to the hands of the player each time he kills." Thompson goes on to say, "I am trying to keep you, dear brother, from being run over by a careening bus." He concludes with, "Bono, I could go on as there's much more to tell you, but you get the idea. We need to meet."

Some points in Thompson's open letter are valid, so it's sad he backed them up with bible citations and vitriolic accusations. Maybe one day he'll make way for an articulate campaigner.



Will brother Bono heed the advice of a clear madman?

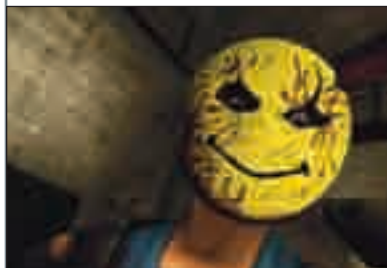
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



KIDS TODAY

Take A Break magazine has gone all *Daily Mail* and decided to campaign against violence in videogames. The move was prompted by a survey revealing that more than 80 per cent of *Take A Break* readers felt they should be banned. The campaign, which bears the comforting name, 'Mum's Army', is targeting various antisocial behaviour rife among the feral youth of today, and videogame violence is high on the list. "Computer games glorify pimping, drug dealing and street murders," the website claims. "Can we control this?" We're gonna go out on a limb and say... no.

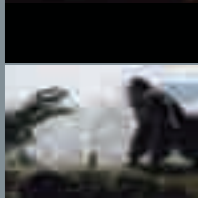
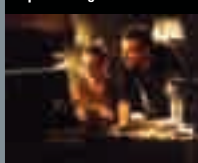


UMD CUT BACKS

So, are UMDs still selling decent numbers? Film studios don't think so. According to *Variety* magazine, sales are far lower than expected, forcing Paramount, Warner Bros and Sony Pictures to reconsider their release schedules. Sony plans to restrict its output to comedy – *Napoleon Dynamite* is the highest selling UMD so far. Paramount will adopt a similar approach while Warner has cancelled the release of six titles. While studios' long-term plans are unclear, if UMD sales don't pick up, the lack of decent releases could see the emerging format in hot water.



■ Uwe Boll – yet to produce a good movie.



■ Peter Jackson, looking most authoritative.

MOVIE AND VIDEOGAME INDUSTRIES MOVING IN THE SAME DIRECTION

CINEMATIC CONVERGENCE

The Lord of the Rings himself Peter Jackson has voiced his approval of movie game tie-ins. The *King Kong* director and executive producer of the forthcoming *Halo* movie has been waxing lyrical about the possibilities that next-generation consoles will give game developers. "I definitely see improved graphics and sound as continuously positive attributes [...] among the Hollywood community," says Jackson. "Actors will look more lifelike in HD and the sound continues to get closer to the theatrical movie experience – this makes it easier to provide sound effects, artwork and talent when you, as a filmmaker, know that the final game will be a strong representation of the film," he adds.

Although it's hard to disagree with him when it comes to *King Kong* – surely one of the best examples of popcorn videogaming yet, despite its obvious shortcomings – that particular title is more of the exception than the rule. There are still far too many generic, third-person, me-too, film-licensed videogames hitting the shelves, but with people

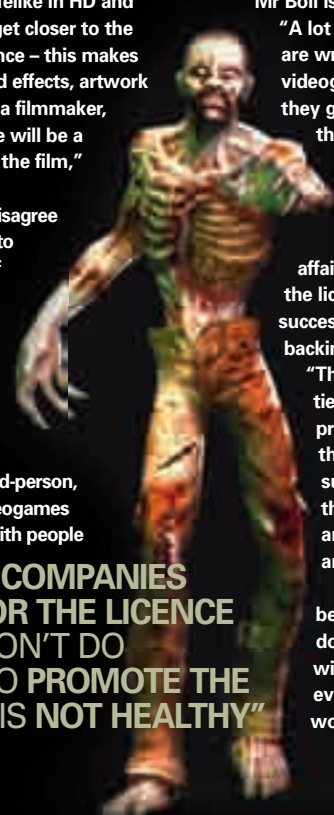
as influential as Jackson taking much more of an interest, there's every chance that could change.

On the other side of the fence sits Uwe Boll, notorious German movie director famed for his low-budget, videogame-based movies. After the cinematic 'treasures' that were *House Of The Dead* and *Alone In The Dark*, Boll's latest work *BloodRayne* has hit American theatres, and received a barrage of flak from moviegoers.

Mr Boll isn't happy, complaining that, "A lot of videogame companies are wrong in how they support videogame-based movies because they get a fee for the licence and then don't do anything to promote the movie." It's a fair point; although Boll's films aren't considered particularly worthwhile affairs, there's no denying that the licences could be made into successes if they received sufficient backing. Boll certainly agrees, "They don't do videogame tie-ins, they don't do cross promotions; they count on the fact that the movie will support the game sales, but they're not willing to spend any money in cross-promoting anything. This is not healthy."

While Boll's grievances may be legitimate, we very much doubt that the *Halo* movie will suffer the same fate. Still, eventually one HAS to be worth watching.

"VIDEOGAME COMPANIES GET A FEE FOR THE LICENCE AND THEN DON'T DO ANYTHING TO PROMOTE THE MOVIE. THIS IS NOT HEALTHY"





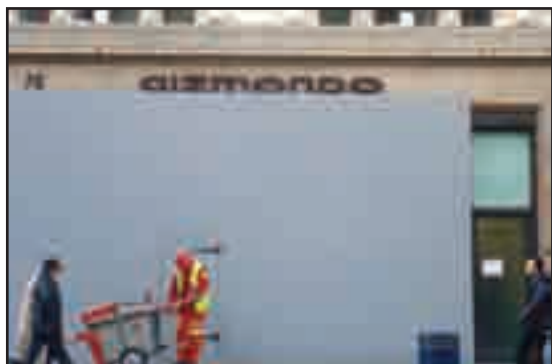
WHAT DID WE SAY?

GIZMONDO EUROPE LIQUIDATED

Following an 'exceptionally successful' US launch and months and months of dodgy accounting, insider dealing and general buffoonery, it would appear that the end is finally nigh for the Gizmondo. Tiger Telematics' European business has officially gone into liquidation, meaning redundancy for any remaining employees (if, indeed, there are any). Not that anyone's going to be too upset – the Gizmondo itself ranks up there with the N-Gage among the most wholly ridiculous game-related devices ever conceived, and many of the company executives have already scooped up as much cash as possible and run for the hills.

Tiger Telematics is now effectively no more, its options being to either sell off as many of its assets as possible in order to pay off debts or to struggle on with Gizmondo US. Faced with operating losses of over \$300 million in 2005, though, it looks unlikely that the company could ever return to profitability by doing so. And to think, things started off so well. One member of Girls Aloud attended the launch party, you know. And they only had to pay Sting several hundred thousand dollars to turn up as well.

This sad news follows months of floundering after the company published its financial results last September during which time it emerged that ex-Gizmondo Europe executive Stefan Eriksson had connections with the Swedish mafia and, along with co-exec Carl Freer, had misappropriated millions on ridiculous salaries, false investments, insider share trading, 'automotive allowances', giving Carl Freer's wife \$750,000 to introduce him to Sting, and so on. Still, it seems Eriksson is doing just fine – mere weeks after leaving Gizmondo under a cloud of allegations and pending lawsuits, he managed to crash a million-dollar Ferrari Enzo (one of only 300-odd left in the world) and blame it on a German man called Dietrich who appeared to evaporate immediately after the crash. Priceless.



■ Look! The shop's all boarded up. A tragedy, indeed.

THE TOP FIVE

GUITAR HERO MULTI-PLAYER TRACKS



No.5 TAKE ME OUT

Nice and easy.



No.4 MORE THAN A FEELING

NEEEEEEW new, new-new-newwww...



No.3 EVEN RATS

Only good bonus track in the game.



No.2 SYMPHONY OF DESTRUCTION

Nobody can do the solo, though.



No.1 BARK AT THE MOON

On Expert, of course. Total madness.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO. 42: MOAN, MOAN, MOAN

This month, delightfully difficult DS rhythm action game *Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!* is coming to Europe. Despite the fact that, at the time of writing, nothing is yet confirmed about a European release, some are already moaning.

People seem to have written the title off in the west and are already lamenting the stupidity of attempting to release such a title on our unsophisticated shores. Quite how bringing *Ouendan* and other such games to a greater audience could be a bad idea is beyond us.

Yet, often when the 'hardcore' discovers that one of its hidden gems is set for release into the mass market, there are complaints – usually from the very same people who lament the casual and unimaginative nature of the UK mass market. It's as if this significant minority of gaming's hardcore audience finds a certain sense of superiority in having to import such titles, and it's an attitude that frustrates and upsets us.

Dooming a game to failure at such an early stage is self-evidently ridiculous. It's almost as if these people actually want it to be unsuccessful in order to justify their sense of superiority over the majority. Grow up, people. This attitude isn't helping anything.



■ We may as well face the facts – they're going to change the soundtrack.

Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Regina Lynn has been announced as a keynote speaker at this year's Sex In Video Games Conference to be held in June. Lynn, the weekly Sex Drive columnist at Wired News and author of *The Sexual Revolution 2.0*, will draw on her own cybersex experiences to discuss interaction in adult communities and how designers can better create workable user-interfaces, input/output devices and in-world functionality. The event will play host to a wide variety of subject matter.

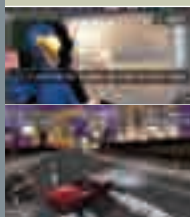


BYE-BYE BOOTH BABES

In a move that will delight some and disappoint others, E3 is seeking to ban Booth Babes once and for all. Games companies have a long tradition of using scantily clad models to promote their wares, but with the industry growing evermore conscious of its reputation as the preserve of sweaty-palmed teenagers, all that could all be about to change. While the practice has always been frowned upon by the E3 organisers, this year will see the addition of a possible \$5,000 fine for anyone caught breaking the rule – hardly a deterrent to the mega-rich likes of Nintendo and Sony.



■ Maybe they should rethink the toilet door logo.



NEW PSP DEMO DOWNLOAD SERVICE HITS JAPAN

CAFÉ DE-MO

A new service that allows Japanese PSP owners to download game demos has been launched by Sony Computer Entertainment Japan. Players will be able to access the demos via special hotspots installed at over 150 branches of the Gourmet Pia café chain. The service, known simply as PlayStation.Spot, uses the handheld machine's unique 'gameshare' feature to enable these downloads. However, players will not be able to store the games on a memory stick; access will only be permitted while the machine is powered up and switched on. Also, keen to stamp out PSP piracy, the demos will only be made available to those who have upgraded their firmware to version 2.0 or above, as is fast becoming the norm with all PSP software.

Currently there's no word on exactly which games will get the downloadable demo treatment. If the service takes off, no doubt we'll see film and television trailers and other assorted media.

Sony is yet to confirm whether or not



■ With any luck a PSP service like this will soon make its way to us Brits.

"IF THE SERVICE TAKES OFF, NO DOUBT WE'LL SEE FILM AND TELEVISION TRAILERS AND OTHER ASSORTED MEDIA"

PlayStation.Spot will make it to these shores, but the words, "it's something we're looking into," from the lips of a Sony spokesman sounds extremely promising. If it was to make it to Europe, we'd speculate that it would be perfectly suited to a Starbucks or Costa type of environment, a slightly more upmarket approach than Nintendo's aforementioned McDonalds involvement.

However, PlayStation.Spot is exactly the kind of idea that makes the current generation of handheld gaming such a fascinating prospect. With both the DS and PSP now making genuine use of their Wi-Fi infrastructure capabilities, the future of handheld gaming is surely set to mirror that of the mobile phone; a future of convergence, of handheld systems that can multi-task and remain in constant contact with the rest of the world. We're not going to pretend we're thrilled with the slightly cynical corporate crossover of the restaurant tie-in, but if European consumers can gain access to free game demos when they're out and about, then that's good enough news for all of us.



■ So, big fella, how do you actually find using the stylus with those sausage fingers?



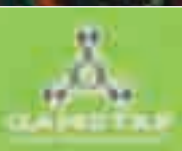
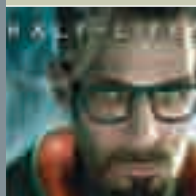
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



THOSE CRAZY YANKS

Anyone who's been keeping track of the whole 'videogame censorship' debate can add another piece of ineffectual legislation to the pile. The US state of Kansas, fronted by democrat Jim Ward, has introduced a new bill, the Child Protection from Violent Video Games Act. The bill proposes fines ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,500 for any retailer caught supplying adult-rated videogames to minors. However, much like one proposed recently by Utah, the bill is unlikely to be passed on constitutional grounds. The Utah bill was recently reviewed by the Pennsylvania Centre for the First Amendment and was found to, "violate the First Amendment protection of free expression."



■ Anything to crack down on those pesky pirates, eh?



SONY EXEC BELIEVES DOWNLOADABLE GAMES WILL HURT PIRACY

DOWN TOWN

Tetsuhiko Yasuda of Sony Computer Entertainment Asia believes that Asian markets would see a downturn in piracy if PS3 games were made available simultaneously at retail and through downloadable channels. Yasuda told a Japanese website, that he felt gamers who currently look to illegal sources for cheap games may consider a more legitimate route if downloadable games were, "offered for half price," compared to the retail market.

Considering the rampant piracy in Asia, any potential method for directing the consumer back to legal channels would surely prove healthy for the industry, and if it forces videogame prices down then it's also

a winning situation for consumers. However, there's been some confusion concerning the translation of Yasuda's interview. Some have taken his comments as Sony's intent, while other translators disagree, saying Yasuda was offering an opinion. It is not fully clear exactly what Sony's position on this matter is as a company, but it's certainly a welcome suggestion, and may also help Sony in the impending online war with Microsoft.

As it stands, Xbox Live (particularly 360) is a far superior service to the PS2 equivalent. If Sony is to fight back on PS3, it will need something innovative and extremely user friendly in its corner, which a downloadable games service could prove to be.

GAMES INDUSTRY REVENUES TO DOUBLE IN NEXT FIVE YEARS

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

An independent study by ABI Research predicts an upturn in revenue for the games industry over the next few years. This is a comfort for those who saw the last Christmas period as a daunting time for gaming with very low sales.

The study explains that the rapid increase in online and mobile gaming is the reason for this potential growth. "The online console gaming market is set to take off," commented Michael Wolf of ABI. "The ability to download game demos, buy casual as well as full-fledged console games, and access advanced content will result in online becoming the key technology component for this and subsequent console generations."

"Gaming has become a mass-market industry on a par with TV,



■ nly far less camp. And more guns. xxxxx xxx

movies and music," Wolf continues, "the ability to play music and media from powerful consoles and handhelds will drive overall industry growth as consumers begin to view gaming devices as one-stop-shop entertainment platforms." Xbox 360 is already proving a multimedia hub, taking many people by surprise with how well integrated its online features are with the system's dashboard.

"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH Jack Thompson on the PlayStation2's DualShock controller:

"It desensitises the user to the act of killing because it sends a visceral jolt back into the hands of the player each time he kills"

games™ says: This statement's ridiculousness is self-evident. We're not sure what we can say that could possibly augment the comedy. Really, we're at a loss. Beautiful.

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!



Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Regina Lynn has been announced as a keynote speaker at this year's Sex In Video Games Conference to be held in June. Lynn, the weekly Sex Drive columnist at Wired News and author of *The Sexual Revolution 2.0*, will draw on her own cybersex experiences to discuss interaction in adult communities and how designers can better create workable user-interfaces, input/output devices and in-world functionality. The event will play host to a wide variety of subject matter.

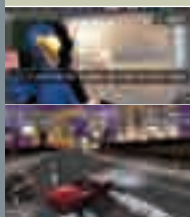


BYE-BYE BOOTH BABES

In a move that will delight some and disappoint others, E3 is seeking to ban Booth Babes once and for all. Games companies have a long tradition of using scantily clad models to promote their wares, but with the industry growing evermore conscious of its reputation as the preserve of sweaty-palmed teenagers, all that could all be about to change. While the practice has always been frowned upon by the E3 organisers, this year will see the addition of a possible \$5,000 fine for anyone caught breaking the rule – hardly a deterrent to the mega-rich likes of Nintendo and Sony.



■ Maybe they should rethink the toilet door logo.



NEW PSP DEMO DOWNLOAD SERVICE HITS JAPAN

CAFÉ DE-MO

A new service that allows Japanese PSP owners to download game demos has been launched by Sony Computer Entertainment Japan. Players will be able to access the demos via special hotspots installed at over 150 branches of the Gourmet Pia café chain. The service, known simply as PlayStation.Spot, uses the handheld machine's unique 'gameshare' feature to enable these downloads. However, players will not be able to store the games on a memory stick; access will only be permitted while the machine is powered up and switched on. Also, keen to stamp out PSP piracy, the demos will only be made available to those who have upgraded their firmware to version 2.0 or above, as is fast becoming the norm with all PSP software.

Currently there's no word on exactly which games will get the downloadable demo treatment. If the service takes off, no doubt we'll see film and television trailers and other assorted media.

Sony is yet to confirm whether or not

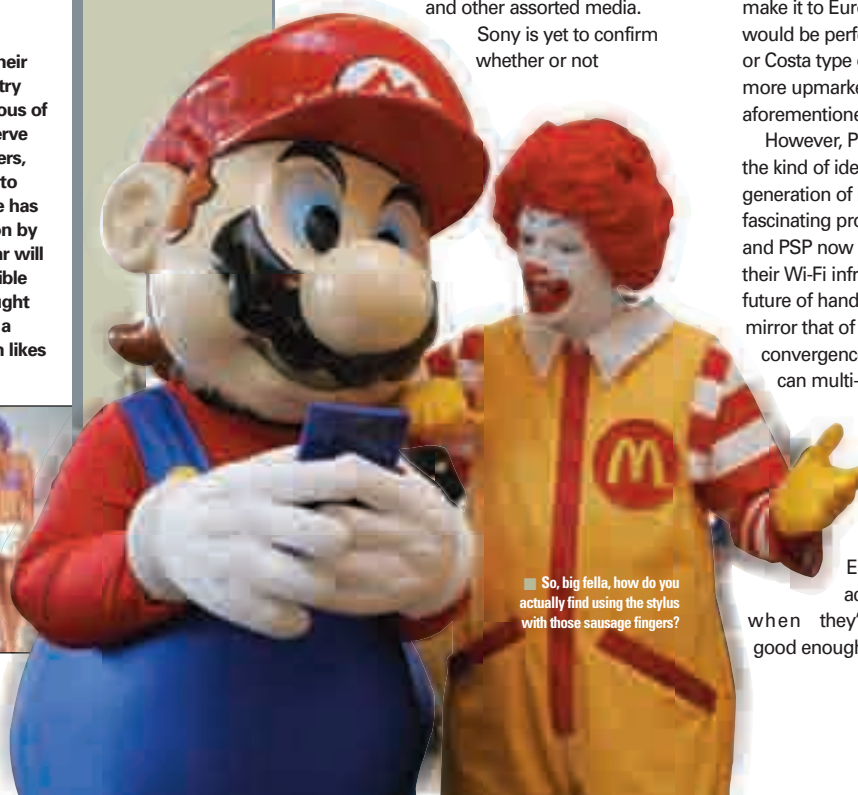


■ With any luck a PSP service like this will soon make its way to us Brits.

"IF THE SERVICE TAKES OFF, NO DOUBT WE'LL SEE FILM AND TELEVISION TRAILERS AND OTHER ASSORTED MEDIA"

PlayStation.Spot will make it to these shores, but the words, "it's something we're looking into," from the lips of a Sony spokesman sounds extremely promising. If it was to make it to Europe, we'd speculate that it would be perfectly suited to a Starbucks or Costa type of environment, a slightly more upmarket approach than Nintendo's aforementioned McDonalds involvement.

However, PlayStation.Spot is exactly the kind of idea that makes the current generation of handheld gaming such a fascinating prospect. With both the DS and PSP now making genuine use of their Wi-Fi infrastructure capabilities, the future of handheld gaming is surely set to mirror that of the mobile phone; a future of convergence, of handheld systems that can multi-task and remain in constant contact with the rest of the world. We're not going to pretend we're thrilled with the slightly cynical corporate crossover of the restaurant tie-in, but if European consumers can gain access to free game demos when they're out and about, then that's good enough news for all of us.



■ So, big fella, how do you actually find using the stylus with those sausage fingers?



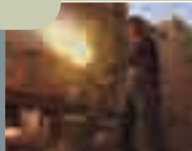
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

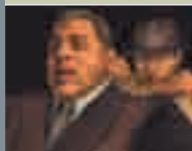


HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO LINK

21 February 2006 was an important moment in gaming history. Okay, it isn't that important, but it did mark the 20th birthday of Link of *The Legend Of Zelda* fame. Besides the odd hairy plumber or blue hedgehog, there are surely only a handful of game characters that will celebrate such an occasion, and with the latest *Zelda* adventure, *The Twilight Princess*, shaping up to be one of the biggest events of this year, it's high time the world saluted one of gaming's pioneering characters. Link, happy birthday.



■ Tony never pays over the odds. He'd shoot you down, soon as look at you.



■ Will a price drop for Xbox games cause a reluctance to upgrade to the 360 console?

AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

CASH BACK

Are you one of the many who failed to lay their hands on the elusive Xbox 360? Perhaps you're staying put until the hyperbole subsides and the next-gen picture becomes clearer? Whatever the case may be, Xbox owners have been granted a much-needed cause for celebration.

Electronic Arts has announced that all future current-gen releases will have their prices slashed by 20 per cent. The move will create a price divide between US Xbox and Xbox 360 games of around \$20, and is designed to improve flagging sales caused by uncertainty surrounding the emerging next-gen technology.

For the US market this means prices of around \$39.95 for high profile new releases such as *The Godfather* and *Black*. "[The price] is resonating with consumers given the transition," EA communications boss Jeff Brown commented. "There are indications that \$39 is a solid, sustainable price point." This is likely to be the first

"LOWER XBOX PRICES HIGHLIGHT JUST HOW EXPENSIVE GAMES FOR THE 360 ARE"

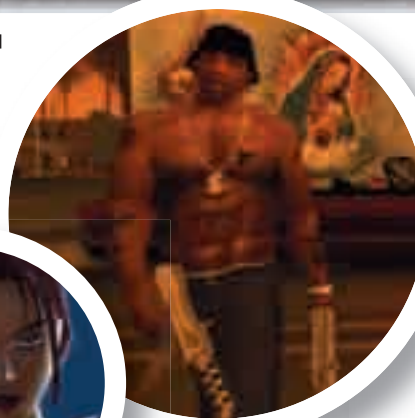
instance of many that will see the Xbox marginalised by its bigger, better brother. But while lower prices may keep the customer happy, they also highlight just how much more expensive games for the 360 are, and could dissuade sceptical consumers from upgrading – a possibility that Microsoft, currently unopposed in the next-gen market, might be a little uncomfortable with.

BEST OF BRITISH

GTA AND TOMB RAIDER VOTED DESIGN ICONS

Everyone loves a list. The human capacity to be outraged by placing things in order of merit is a primary cause of irate pub conversations up and down the land, and the news that *Tomb Raider* and *GTA* have been short-listed as icons of British design is certain to set tongues a-wagging. The announcement is the result of a survey by BBC programme *The Culture Show* to find the public's favourite piece of British design. The list includes such hallowed names as Concorde, the Tube Map and the World Wide Web. The inclusion of two console games among the final ten is likely to provoke excessive

■ Lara Croft really is quite an oil painting.



hand-wringing among purists.

While no amount of snobbery could detract from

San Andreas' status as a piece of design genius, the news may not be as significant as some would hope. This kind of poll, particularly when decided by a public vote, is often riddled with fads, trends or whatever constitutes the public zeitgeist of the time, and whether Lara Croft's status as a national treasure has any longevity is far from certain. The likelihood is that neither item would make the list in 25 years' time, but for now it's further proof of the emerging cultural dominance of videogames.

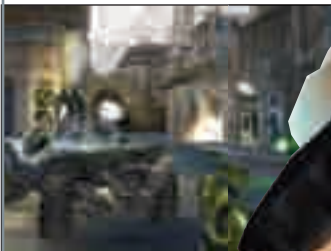


HALO 2 DOMINATES 360

Microsoft's director of programming for Xbox Live, Larry Hyrb, has finally broken the silence on the movers and shakers for the Live service for 360. He revealed that *Halo 2* is the most played game on the 360, with *COD2* and *Perfect Dark Zero* taking second and third respectively. This restates the dominance of FPSs as the genre of choice among the online community. The rest of the list, in descending order, is: *Dead Or Alive 4*, *Project Gotham Racing 3*, *Need For Speed: Most Wanted*, *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat*, *Madden NFL 2006*, and finally, *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*.



■ The puffer jacket – a masterpiece of design.







LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD

■ Girls in games tend to be of a certain mould. However, they quickly broke Lula's.

"LULA'S MANNEQUIN PALS GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF ON THE SCREEN WAS SUDDENLY LESS PATHETIC

Sometimes, when people ask me to do things, I do them. It's a problem I'm trying to overcome, but when talking to a real live person on the phone it's hard to say no. It happened to me one December afternoon: I received a call asking if I'd attend a press shindig for CDV. Why did I say yes?

I'd never heard of any CDV? But the PR guy also does work for SNK, and sends me games when they come out. If my mother taught me one thing, it's that you should feel guilty for everything. If someone does something nice for you, feel bad about it. So, without hesitation, I said, "Okay, I will go to the CDV press thingy, and yes, I'll bring a co-worker."

So I rallied the troops (just one troop, really), and set off for a 'private dining' spot called Ambrosia. Or something. My girlfriend drove us, and offered these cautionary words:

"don't flirt with any girls." "Not to worry," says I, "there won't be any girls there anyway. Only sweaty men with undersized shirts and oversized bellies." So she removed the ropes and let me out of the car. Metaphorical ropes, I assure you.

It was a nice joint – brownish red walls with relief floral patterns, a red and yellow oriental carpet, light fixtures that cast an amber glow, and enough room to comfortably fit 30 standees. A modest buffet

was served on the bar toward the back. The tables had been cleared away, save those with computer monitors on them, all of which naturally played games. Boring, drab real-time strategy games. CDV, it turns out, is a German company. That's your neck of the woods, I know, but it still counts as American, since the event took place in San Francisco. Loophole! Anyway, CDV makes RTS games, all with names like 'Panzersomething' or 'Blitzkrieg'. But they also make *Lula 3D*.

You've heard of this. It's a sex game – you play a porn starlet, on top of her porn empire. On top, that is, until the triplets get kidnapped. Can't make the next picture without the triplets. It's up to you to navigate inane point-and-click adventure scenarios, stopping to have sterile, efficient German sex along the way. It's not that bad with a few beers in you, though.

As is common with press events, they were not light on the libations. My friend and I made good use of their generosity, and got nicely buzzed. Lula's mannequin pals going through the motions of impossibly awkward sex on the screen was suddenly less pathetic and more amusing. By this time, the room had filled up with sweaty males. As I'd promised, not a girl in sight. Save the waitresses, that is. No foul there, though. I'm not the boss of the restaurant. At least... not yet.

As there were a number of people attending, the waiting staff began to mill around serving hors d'oeuvres. A girl with tattooed wrists came over to us. "Crab cakes?" Before the alcohol shot



IMPOSSIBLY AWKWARD SEX AND MORE AMUSING"

something ribald off about cakes, my brain spouted out, "Can't, I'm a vegetarian." Which is true. Good old brain, citing facts in times of need. And there was no vegetarian food there whatsoever. We turned our attention back to a particularly nasty puzzle in *Lula*. Turns out we needed to drive to San Francisco, but didn't have the car keys. Pity.

Back came the waitress, this time with a plate of things I'd seen before on the bar, only different. "Here," she said. "These are vegetarian. I made them myself. I'm a vegetarian, too." Oh no. Two girls in the whole damned place and one of them has found me. I took some of the food (no foul there either, doesn't count if you're hungry), and turned back to the task at hand. Oh. Turns out the guy who asked me to go to San Francisco in the first place had the keys all along, I just had to ask someone if she knew where they were first.

The waitress was back with the last of the vegetarian thingies. "Take these," she said. "I'll make something else." Uh oh. "And let me get you another drink." She took my beer. My friend standing next to me looked at the empty glass in his hand. "I need a drink, too." But she was gone, then instantly back with my drink. This was... perhaps not good. That evening's recipe for disaster was composed of naked 3D women, booze, a friendly tattooed waitress, a jealous girlfriend, and one sap of a game journalist. Not keen to be the final ingredient, I realised it was time to make an exit. I grabbed my pal and went for the door, without so much as a goodbye for *Lula*.

Many thanks

Brandon

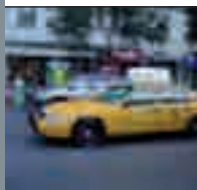
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN...

Black cabs



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA...

Yellow cabs



AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES
AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND
OF THE FREE

LOTS OF EXCESS

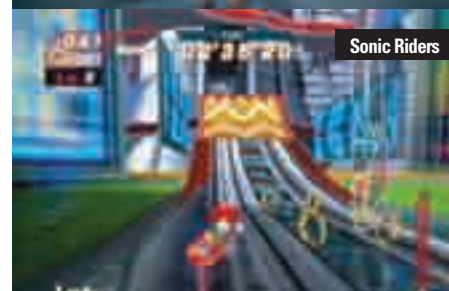
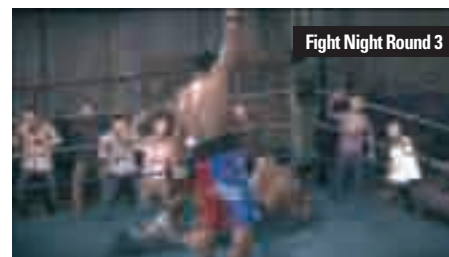


Nothing says America like excess. Former Gizmodo exec Stefan Eriksson was excessive in many ways. Excessively greedy when he stole money from investors, excessively flashy when he bought a very rare \$1 million Ferrari Enzo and excessively stupid when he crashed it into a light pole in LA at 162 mph, shearing it in twain. He blamed it on a German named Dietrich who apparently fled the scene. Clever.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Fight Night Round 3	EA Sports	PS2
2	Fight Night Round 3	EA Sports	Xbox
3	WWE Smackdown! Vs RAW '06	THQ	PS2
4	Sonic Riders	Sega	PS2
5	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	PS2
6	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Xbox
7	Sonic Riders	Sega	GC
8	True Crime: New York City	Activision	PS2
9	GUN	Activision	PS2
10	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	PS2

(Updated 06/03/06)



Fight Night Round 3

Sonic Riders



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"THE SCENARIO WAS REPORTEDLY FULLY WRITTEN. THE BATTLE DONE. THE GAME WAS REPORTEDLY MANY THINGS.

Mother 3 will be released by Nintendo on the GBA on 20 April. This has levels of profound resonance that you may not understand. The simplest way to explain it is to say that it has been in development since 1995, months after *Mother 2* was out. It was originally planned for release on the N64, and then the N64 Disk Drive; things happened, and the game was delayed and then cancelled. The game's producer Shigesato Itoi was reportedly not happy with the game's look: blocky, low-polygon character models stumbling around flat-shaded environments. The scenario was reportedly fully written. The battle engine was reportedly done. The game was reportedly many things. Then it was gone.

It has now become a legend. All over the Internet you can find distraught people of all ages who played *Mother 2* (released in English as *Earthbound*), completed the game, felt the horrifying catharsis the game intended to evoke, and then realised, years later, that they wanted to play another game like it. They turned their eyes and ears to Itoi's weblog (or, if they didn't speak Japanese, started their own Internet communities where they grabbed every passer-by who spoke the language), and waited for him to say anything at all about the development of the game. He rarely said anything. He

talked about curry shops in Tokyo, or baseball, or classic rock. He wrote a book-length interview with baseball star Ichiro Suzuki. He inserted jokes here and there about 'down-porting' the game to Super Famicom, which a lot of fans wish he had done. When the *Mother 1* and *2* compilation was released on GBA, Itoi's blog casually indicated that *Mother 3* would also be released "sooner or later." That was two years ago. Since then, the number of my friends who claim to have 'played' the game at a Nintendo Spaceworld show in 2001 have multiplied threefold.

When the *Brain Training* games took over Japan, Itoi was a big supporter of innovation. I exchanged a few words with him outside the press conference where Nintendo debuted the Revolution in September 2005. I asked if he was excited about making a game for it. He said, "Oh, definitely." I asked, "*Mother 3*?" And he replied, "Well, the biggest problem with that is... I imagine it would have to be *Mother 4*." Just two weeks later, he set a certain part of the Internet on fire, by saying that he wouldn't rest until the game was done. And just a week before I sit here writing this, the first media of the game, as well as its release date, surfaced on the net.

On his weblog www.1101.com he has opened a special page where inquiring visitors can open 'presents' that count down the weeks to the game's release. The second present was a piano recording of the game's *Love* theme. The third included



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 42:

Yonsai to juuyonsai wa ikiyou to omotta.

Ochikondari mo shita keredo, watashi wa genki desu.

Sukina hito ga, dekimashita.

Tonneru no mukou wa, fushigi no machi deshita.

Kimyou de, omoshiroi. Soshite, setsunai.

SHIGESATO ITOI'S FAMOUS AD LINES

A four year-old and a 14 year-old thought about surviving. (*Grave Of The Fireflies* poster line)

I was depressed for a little bit; I'm okay now. (*Kiki's Delivery Service* poster)

I found someone I love. (*Whispers Of The Hearts* poster)

At the end of the tunnel was a mysterious city. (*Spirited Away* poster)

It was bizarre. It was fascinating. And then, it was devastating. (*Mother 3* copy)



THE SOUND OF MUSIC

The *Love* theme of the game is a light, jazzy thing composed by Keiichi Suzuki, composer of the legendary *Mother 2* soundtrack and the scores for films such as *Zatoichi*. I downloaded the ringtone of the song and now every time my phone rings it turns my Coca Cola into whiskey, and spaghetti into cigarettes. It makes life a post-noir love story.

Itoi says on his blog that he hopes the song will be played in various places before the game's release. I called the post office recently, and you know what the on-hold music was? Yes, the *Love* theme from *Mother 3*. There I was, sitting on my sofa, phone against my ear, and suddenly I was transported somewhere far away.

Itoi is among Japan's elite writers. However, unlike writers of modern literature, he doesn't write 'paragraphs' or 'stories'. He's a writer of 'signs' – like the character at the beginning of *Mother 2* who explains that he's written all the signs you'll encounter in the world. (He also loves garlic, and eating garlic keeps him from being afraid of anything.)

ENGINE WAS REPORTEDLY THEN IT WAS GONE"

the first screenshots – and also confirmed that the story is the same as that of the ill-fated N64 title.

Itoi has changed since the release of *Mother 2*; the themes in his writing have taken a darker direction. He has become what you could call an 'entrepreneur of the soul'. *Mother 3* will be a story about a cowboy, his twin sons, their dog, a quest to find their mother, and a dying pig-man who has, for centuries, held the world in his evil grasp, and is finally beginning to reconsider the consequences of his actions. Sega's *Ryu Ga Gotoku* was the first game I've played where the story is as good as a Japanese soap opera. This brought up the sudden realisation that we've never had stories in games that aspire to literature. *Mother 2* evoked a catharsis through its structure. Itoi says he hopes *Mother 3* will top it. Who knows at this point?

Kind regards

Tim Rogers

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	FF VII: Dirge Of Cerberus	Square-Enix	PS2
2	English Training DS	Nintendo	DS
3	Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams	Capcom	PS2
4	Brain Age 2	Nintendo	DS
5	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS
6	Brain Age	Nintendo	DS
7	Ar Tonelico	Banpresto	PS2
8	Bleach DS	Sega	DS
9	Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	DS
10	World Soccer Winning Eleven: Bonus	Konami	PS2

(Week ending 23/01/06 © 2006 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)



THINK TANK

THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS...

DEDICATED FOLLOWER OF VIDEOGAMES



I'M NOT FASHIONABLE. I don't have the time, budget or nose for it. As far as games go I am influenced greatly by their

graphics, but I don't think I'd make a decision to purchase based solely on the screenshots.

As far as hardware goes, the appearance of the box doesn't even register on my radar. I chose my MP3 player based on functions and cost rather than shininess. I replaced my GBA with a GBA SP because a backlit screen and a rechargeable battery were very appealing features. My big clumsy hands still find it a little too small, though – especially after an extended *Drill Dozer* session.

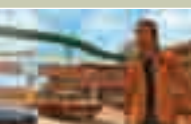
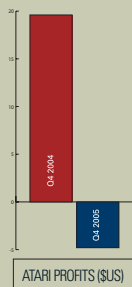
I don't think I'd ever replace something I already own with a superficially enhanced version. I just don't get it. To me, hardware is a box of potential. On its own it is nothing. If you tie a pretty bow around a box of nothing then what do you have? How is it better than its earlier iteration? I'm one of those annoying people that dishes out the 'but it's all about the games' line when new hardware is being discussed.

With so many manufacturers having redesigned their gaming hardware over the years it's clearly worth doing. People are buying V2.0 of things because it suits their lifestyle. Perhaps they'll give their younger brother or sister the old machine while they play on their shiny new one. Perhaps the new design is enough to seal the deal for those who felt they needed to replace their aging original console or handheld. Perhaps dayglo-pink just screams 'buy me' to some folk.

There is considerably more to discuss on this matter but space is limited and my new wallpaper brochure has just arrived. Ceramic white or navy blue?

Mr X doesn't like many things. Deep down, though, he still loves games.

ATARI GETS ITSELF INTO EVEN MORE TROUBLE FOLLOWING DISASTROUS Q3 RESULTS



Atari is pinning its hopes on *Driver: Parallel Lines* while *Marc Ecko's Getting Up* performs disappointingly.



Yay! Another excuse to print *Devil May Cry* screens.



Resident Evil 4 continues to do well, and quite rightly so.

FROM THE FRONT

ATARI'S PROFITS ARE POOR WHILE CAPCOM'S SOAR. OH AND TAKE-TWO GETS INTO TROUBLE WITH THE LAW – AGAIN...

HEADING FOR A CRASH

Regular readers may recall that a few months ago, Atari was forced to enter negotiations with its funding bodies and parent company Infogrames following disappointing Q2 results. The lack of a successful brand-name title since 2004's *Driv3r* saw the firm's profits taking a dive. Unfortunately, the situation has worsened in recent weeks after the announcement of Q3 figures led HSBC to cease funding the company entirely.

The results reveal a \$4.8 million net loss for the quarter ending 31 December 2005, although this is slightly less alarming than the previous quarter's \$25.2 million loss. Overall, Atari is now seriously struggling financially, with even its supportive parent company Infogrames beginning to lose faith. Its share price, understandably, is now at an all-time low of \$0.90.

Since the results, Atari has declared cost-cutting plans including the culling of 80 employees worldwide, amounting to 20 per cent of its total workforce. At the time of going to press, it's not clear which of Atari's studios will suffer the cuts. Having already closed two studios in the past year,

it seems that the publisher is determined to do whatever it takes to stay in business, this includes the sale of various intellectual properties and auctioning off some of its development studios.

It seems Atari is counting on the success of the recently released and long-delayed *Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure*, but sales so far have been quite poor and the publisher may have to rely on the forthcoming *Driver 4* (reviewed page 108) to boost profits.

The outlook for Atari remains bleak – its disastrous Q3 results came despite the high-profile release of *The Matrix: Path Of Neo* and two releases in its popular *Dragonball Z* franchise. CEO Bruno Bonnel remains upbeat following the release of the figures, stating that the company will be undertaking 'decisive action' in order to get back on its feet.

Bonnel also announced new titles from the publisher including a next-gen *Stuntman* game and a remake of *Battlezone* for PSP. Further instalments in *Alone In The Dark* may be planned. Whether the company will survive long enough to release such titles is dubious when even a top-selling *Matrix* game has failed to push the publisher back into profit.

IN THE MONEY

CAPCOM IN RECORD PROFIT

We were delighted to see Capcom, one of our favourite publishers, announce record profits in what has been an unusually slow quarter for the industry as a whole. The firm announced a net income of \$52.3 million, four times that of the previous year.

This success can be attributed to the continuing appeal of *Resi Evil 4* across all territories following the PS2 release, as well as a promising start for its mobile phone business. Toys and merchandise accounted for much of the firm's Japanese profits, although *Mega Man Battle Network 6* (GBA), and *Monster Hunter* (PSP) also exceeded expectations doing well in the east.

Capcom's success is especially noteworthy now, when even EA has been hit by slow sales as the market begins to adjust in preparation for the next-gen shift. Capcom has reinforced its intentions to swing focus onto new titles, but is also keen to capitalise on its recent handheld success with new DS and PSP titles. Anything that gets *Devil May Cry 4* finished is fine by us.





IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW

TAKE-TWO CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

More lawsuits have been filed against Take-Two/2K Games, alleging insider trading and dodgy business practices. After last year's *San Andreas* scandal come more worrying accusations of fraudulent activity and illegal business practices. Accusing law firms Milberg Weiss and Stull, Stull & Brody expect more legal irregularities to emerge following investigation.

Irregular accounting, mismanagement and withholding damaging information are among the charges against the software publisher and its executive management team. Milberg Weiss alleges that Take-Two helped insiders gain \$18 million from illegally trading shares, and is actively

seeking out shareholders who might be able to help their case – people who owned shares in the firm between October 2004 and February 2006.

Jack Thompson's case against the company may have been prevented from coming to court, but it seems that Take-Two's legal worries are far from over.

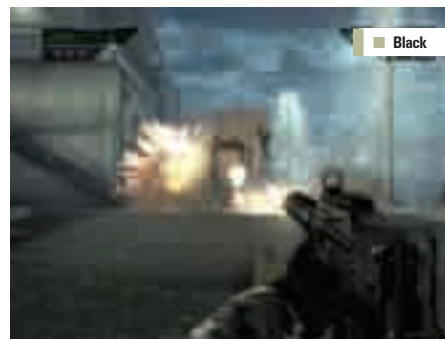


UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

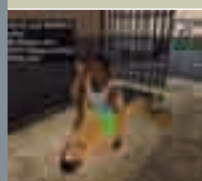
	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Black	EA Games	Multi
2	TOCA Race Driver 3	Codemasters	Multi
3	Need For Speed: Most Wanted	EA Games	Multi
4	Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	PS2
5	Star Wars: Empires At War	Rockstar	PSP
6	FIFA '06	EA Sports	Multi
7	The Sims 2	EA Games	Multi
8	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Multi
9	Chicken Little	Buena Vista	Multi
10	Torino 2006 Winter Olympics	2K Sports	Multi

We're not at all surprised that EA's blasting beauty *Black* is top dog this month we reviewed it last issue and it's quite an experience. But what happened to *Dead Or Alive*? It's vanished without trace – shame. Oh great, *Chicken Little*'s down there at number nine.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 25 February 2006)



■ Black



■ Another look at the silly GTA 'sex' scenes. What was all the fuss about, again?



■ Shadow Of The Colossus



■ FIFA '06

RELEASE LISTS



Guitar Hero: PS2
One of 2005's finest titles arrives next month.



Me And My Katamari: PSP
All of space and time in the palm of your hand.



Super Monkey Ball Adventure:
Multi More simian silliness from the chaps at Sega.



games™ MOST PLAYED

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony

After months of waiting, Sony's masterpiece is upon us. Revisiting the 16 colossi is as enthralling as it was the first time; the monster design continues to amaze and subtleties are revealed every time we see the beasts. Nothing can match *Shadow's* artistry and drama.



SILENT HILL 4

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

With the movie fast approaching, we deemed it necessary to revisit the latest in Konami's terrifying survival horror series. Although the hub structure and repetition still grate, the oppressive atmosphere that has defined *Silent Hill* over the years is every bit as tangible and horrific as ever.



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

Format: Xbox 360

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Unsurprisingly perhaps, EA's magnificent boxing sim has become the lunchtime game of choice in recent weeks, even usurping *Pro Evo* from the office screens.

The one-upmanship and trash talking is taking inter-magazine rivalries to new levels. As is a particularly sweet victory via a Ricky Hatton haymaker.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
24 March	The Godfather	Electronic Arts
24 March	Pro Evolution Soccer Management	Konami
31 March	Sonic Riders	Sega
31 March	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ
31 March	And1 Streetball	Ubisoft
31 March	Ice Age 2: The Meltdown	VU Games
31 March	Metal Slug 5	SNK Playmore
31 March	OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	Sega
31 March	Taito Legends 2	Explosiv
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	Konami
APRIL '06		
07 April	Guitar Hero	Red Octane
07 April	Final Fight: Streetwise	Capcom
07 April	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos
07 April	State Of Emergency 2	PlayLogic
21 April	Socom 3 US Navy SEALs	Sony
TBC	GTA: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar
MAY '06		
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K Games
Q2 '06		
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami
TBC	Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	Koei
TBC	Bully	Rockstar
TBC	Scarface	VU Games
TBC '06		
TBC	Final Fantasy XII	Sony
TBC	Okami	Capcom
TBC	Kingdom Hearts II	Sony
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega
TBC	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	Koei
TBC	Mortal Kombat Armageddon	Midway
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega

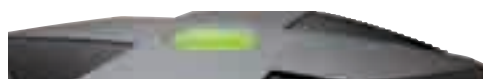


GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
17 March	Sonic Riders	Sega
31 March	Odama	Nintendo
31 March	Ice Age 2: The Meltdown	VU Games
31 March	Namco Arcade 50th Anniversary	Electronic Arts
MAY '06		
26 May	Chibi-Robo	Nintendo

TBC '06

TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo
TBC	Harvest Moon: Magical Melody	Rising Star



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
24 March	The Godfather	Electronic Arts
31 March	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ
31 March	Sonic Riders	Sega
31 March	Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII	Ubisoft
31 March	Far Cry Instincts: Next Chapter	Ubisoft
31 March	OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	Sega
31 March	Taito Legends 2	Explosiv
APRIL '06		
07 April	Final Fight Streetwise	Capcom
07 April	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos
MAY '06		
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K Games
Q2 '06		
TBC	Scarface	VU Games
TBC	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami
TBC '06		
TBC	Sensible Soccer	Kuju
TBC	Starcraft: Ghost	Blizzard
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft
TBC	Bully	Rockstar
TBC	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos
TBC	Mortal Kombat Armageddon	Midway
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega



XBOX 360

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
24 March	Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games
31 March	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts
31 March	Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII	Ubisoft
31 March	Far Cry Instincts: Predator	Ubisoft
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari
APRIL '06		
07 April	Top Spin 2	2K Games
13 April	Football Manager 2006	Sega
MAY '06		

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

Test Drive Unlimited:
Xbox 360 Will it ever see
the light of day?



Drill Dozer: GBA
Don't go breaking
my heart.



OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast:
Multi Better late than never for
the arcade racing beauty.



Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion:
Multi 2K Games' epic
is fast approaching.

20 April	Moto GP 06	THQ
Q2 '06		
TBC	Chromehounds	Sega
TBC	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos
TBC	TimeShift	Atari
TBC	Prey	2K Games
TBC	Saint's Row	THQ
TBC '06		
TBC	Dead Rising	Capcom
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari
TBC	Final Fantasy XI	Sega
TBC	Too Human	Microsoft
TBC	Gears Of War	Microsoft
TBC	Prey	2K Games
TBC	Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	Capcom
TBC	Blue Dragon	Microsoft
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft
TBC	Ninety Nine Nights	Microsoft



PC

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
24 March	The Godfather	Electronic Arts
24 March	Faces Of War	Ubisoft
24 March	TimeShift	Atari
31 March	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ
31 March	True Crime: New York City	Activision
APRIL '06		
13 April	Auto Assault	NCSOFT
28 April	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos
28 April	LMA Manager 2006	Codemasters
MAY '06		
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K games
26 May	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos
26 May	Heroes Of Might And Magic V	Ubisoft
26 May	Unreal Tournament 2007	Midway
Q2 '06		
TBC	Company Of Heroes	THQ
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA Enlight	
TBC '06		
TBC	Titan Quest	THQ
TBC	Heart Of Empire: Rome	Deep Silver
TBC	Hellgate London	Namco
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.	THQ
TBC	Spore	Electronic Arts
TBC	Tabula Rasa	NCSOFT

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
31 March	Tales Of Phantasia	Namco

APRIL '06		
07 April	Top Spin Tennis 2	2K Games
JUN '06		
02 June	Drill Dozer	Nintendo
02 June	Final Fantasy IV	Nintendo

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
24 March	Final Fight: Streetwise	Capcom
24 March	Mega Man: Powered Up	Capcom
24 March	Worms Open Warfare	THQ
31 March	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft
31 March	OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	Sega
31 March	Exit	Ubisoft
31 March	Monster Hunter Freedom	Capcom
31 March	Splinter Cell Essentials	Ubisoft
TBC	Tokobot	2K Games
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts
TBC	NBA Ballers: Rebound	Midway

APRIL '06		
13 April	Football Manager Handheld	Sega
MAY '06		
05 May	Me & My Katamari	Electronic Arts
JUNE '06		
28 June	PoPoLoCrois	Agetec Inc.
TBC	Infected	Majesco Games

TBC 2006		
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	Capcom
TBC	Gran Turismo 4: Mobile	Sony

NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
24 March	Worms Open Warfare	THQ
31 March	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo
31 March	Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	Capcom
31 March	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Capcom

APRIL '06		
07 April	Top Spin 2	2K Games
07 April	Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Nintendo
21 April	Electroplankton	Nintendo
MAY '06		
05 May	Metroid Pinball	Nintendo
12 May	Prof Kawashima's Brain Training	Nintendo
26 May	Super Princess Peach	Nintendo

Q2 '06		
TBC	Harvest Moon	Rising Star
TBC	Boktai 2	Konami
TBC	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom

TBC '06		
TBC	New Super Mario Bros.	Nintendo
TBC	Metroid Prime: Hunters	Nintendo
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom

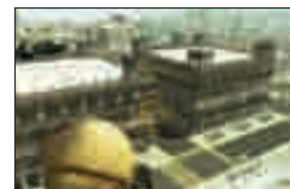
games™ ON THE HORIZON

GHOST RECON: AWF

Format: Xbox 360

Publisher: Ubisoft

The next-gen iteration of Ubisoft's squad-based shooter is tantalisingly close and with a few short weeks until release, we've been revisiting the previous titles to hone our Clancy skill set. Mexico City looks stunning; all bleached skylines and urban decay, and the gameplay is shaping up as tactical and tense as ever.



PROF KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING

Format: GameCube

Publisher: Nintendo

It's been topping Japanese charts for months, and now Nintendo's bizarre puzzler is to hit these shores. It shows the broad appeal of the DS that something so Japanese-centric can (Nintendo hopes) find a market in the west.



DEAD RISING

Format: Xbox 360

Publisher: Capcom

Yet more screens of this Romero-'em-up have been released, fulfilling our desire for the definitive zombie movie experience. The number of shambling creatures on screen at any one time is quite astonishing, as is the ugliness of the central character. Hopes are still high for this one.



PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



Who are they kidding? That boy's no teddy. **Teddy Boy**, SMS [Sega] 1986





TIMESHIFT

SHIFTING PARADIGMS WITH ATARI'S MIND-BENDING SHOOTER

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Saber
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16

CONCEPT

■ A time-bending first-person shooter that is looking to redefine the boundaries of what can be achieved within the genre.

HISTORY

■ *TimeShift* has been in development for quite some time, suffering delays and setbacks aplenty.

Until the last few months, the first-person shooter genre had become unpleasantly stale.

Before Criterion's ferocious *Black* exploded onto current-gen consoles and gave the genre the wake up call it desperately needed, nothing had even come close to the twinned Holy 'H's of *Half-Life* and *Halo*. We've shivered through *Cold Winter*, raced headlong into *Project: Snowblind*, but nothing managed to spark that mix of tension, freneticism and total immersion that should be an FPS's raison d'être. Mercifully, this is all about to change. *Black* may have opened the door for an FPS renaissance, but Atari's *TimeShift* is looking to start a revolution.


"We've thought long and hard about how this is going to be really, really different," says Kyle Peschel, the game's producer. Clearly he's talking about *TimeShift*'s much-publicised USP: the main character's ability to bend and shape the very fabric of time to his own advantage. "Every gameplay decision was made to get the players using the time control mechanic. The main character, Colonel Swift, is able to slow, stop and

reverse time. The really cool thing is that you can do all this while still interacting with the environment. It's not like you rewind time and your character also rewinds as well, you can actually rewind time and still move the character around the environment. If you want to use that to hide from something then you can, if you want to use that to try and approach a situation differently you can, or if you just like bringing enemies back to life again to shoot them again... you can!"

The ability to alter time is no longer anything new. The Prince has been using it to manipulate his fate in ancient Persia for quite some time now, and has even found time to lend this most useful of abilities to the drivers in Sega's destructive Xbox 360 title *Full Auto*. And please don't even get us started on *Blinx*. *TimeShift* is looking as though it will achieve something different, however. Just as *Half-Life 2* lets the player have as much fun playing with the game world as they do from progressing through the story, Atari's shooter is all about player interaction, interpretation and experimentation.

"WE WANTED TO MAKE THE PLAYER FEEL LIKE GOD"

KYLE PESCHEL, PRODUCER



■ Jungle environments are becoming part and parcel of the first-person shooter genre.

"We wanted to make the player feel like God," enthuses Peschel, "that's why you've got the three key features: slow, stop and reverse time. The really great thing about these features is that with any given situation there is often the possibility of using all three to produce the desired outcome. For example, there's a gate you need to get through and there's a switch inside the hut beside the gate. However, when you throw the switch you realise that you don't have the time to just run from the switch and through the gate. So the player now has the choice, do they: 1) throw the switch then activate 'slow time' and race round and through the gate before it closes again, 2) throw the switch and activate 'stop time' and run round and through the gate before it closes, or 3) throw the switch, wander round to the gate but just as it closes you activate 'reverse time' and the gate opens in front of you. This is just a very basic bit that the player will have to negotiate and things become a lot trickier, but believe me, we've really thought long and hard about how we can constantly

get the player using the mechanics in a really fun way".

Obviously the ability to control time will be used in far more interesting settings than a simple gate opening conundrum. Imagine blowing an enemy vehicle ten feet in the air, then noticing a soldier move to where the vehicle was sitting; hit 'time reverse' and watch in awe as the vehicle hurtles back down to earth and crushes him to death. It may throw up more confusion and logistical nightmares than *Back To The Future*, but there's no denying that it's immensely entertaining.

The secret to this is advanced physics – reversing time would be no fun in a completely static world. "The stuff we're doing on the Xbox 360 for *TimeShift* could never have been done on the original Xbox, that's why it's so exciting to be working on it. The physics that we have running is very, very complex, which is why it's lucky that we have a team of super Russian coders doing all the maths. Those guys know their stuff," Peschel tells us, "we realised that once you give the player the ability to move objects around then there are other issues beyond pure physics control. For example, opponents will become aware of the changing environment because of the physics interaction. In *TimeShift*, opponents very often use objects to hide behind. When such objects become affected by the physics, enemies then update their navigation information. Even

SUITED AND BOOTED

Colonel Swift's rather unique time-travelling abilities come not from a dagger or a Hoover, but a rather nifty suit. Apparently costing over a billion dollars (which still sounds pretty cheap considering what it's capable of doing) the suit can allow Swift to slow down, stop and reverse time. Quite how, we're not sure, but if it means we can dispose of enemies in a hilarious and violent fashion, then that's good enough for us. Like the rest of the game's story, it's a little thin and unsubstantiated, but an all-action shooting game should be about all-action shooting, and not deep characterisation or plot twists. Still, we fully expect some trite cut-scenes and ill-advised dialogue to crop up during *TimeShift*.

TIMESHIFT

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Aside from the little-known Will Rock, Saber Interactive made very few moves in the industry before *TimeShift* came along. The game has been in development for over two years now, and if it's a success it will surely place Saber firmly on the development map.

HISTORY

- *TIMESHIFT* 2006 [Multi]
- *WILL ROCK* 2003 [PS]

■ The visuals don't quite match up to some next-gen efforts, but the physics more than make up for it.

"THERE'S HUGE STEAM-PUNK INFLUENCES, YOU KNOW, LIKE HUGE FLYING AIRSHIPS THAT LOOK LIKE THEY'VE EVOLVED OUT OF THE THIRTIES AND FORTIES BUT RUNNING WITH THE HELP OF TECHNOLOGY WE HAVE NOWADAYS, ALMOST LIKE THE BOOK 1984"

KYLE PESCHEL, PRODUCER

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TIMEBOMB

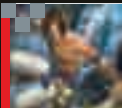


PRINCE OF
PERSIA

HALF-LIFE 2

1984

TIMESHIFT



TIME-BENDING PROFILE

■ Although *TimeShift* is breaking new ground for an FPS, the concept of time manipulation in videogames is nothing new. Perhaps its most famous exponent is the acrobatic Prince of Persia who, for better or worse, introduced the Rewind to videogaming. Nothing will ever be the same again.

HISTORY

- **PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME** 2003 [Multi]
- **FULL AUTO** 2006 [Xbox 360]
- **BLINX: THE TIME SWEEPER** 2002 [Xbox]

■ Imagine stopping time mid explosion, strolling around to the other side, then pressing 'play'.

simple doors, or other animated objects are affected by physics. *TimeShift* also utilises the unique game mechanic of 'time reversal', as you know. Therefore, all those physics interactions need to be recorded so that they can be played back when 'reversal' is activated and that's a very cool feature – seeing physics-controlled objects fly backwards".

'Very Cool' and *TimeShift* seem to go hand in hand. The visuals aren't completely up to scratch when you compare them to some of the more advanced next-gen titles (it's definitely more PC than PGR) but the number of polygons or normal mapped textures matter very little when you're ruining your oponents' lives with the powers of an angry deity. The game's look carries a strong identity also – half comic book, half *Blade Runner*, and while not exactly the last bastion of originality in videogame storytelling, it's still nice to be able to shoot people outside World War II (if shooting people can ever be considered 'nice', that is).

"The game is set in an alternative reality," says Peschel, "there's huge steam-punk influences, you know, like huge flying airships that look like they've evolved out of the Thirties and Forties but running with the help of the technology we have got nowadays, almost like the book 1984. During an experiment into time travel you return and find that the world you left behind you has changed dramatically. It is your quest to return the world back to its normal state and fight against Dr Krone and his steam punk chaotic world". Pure videogame hokum, undoubtedly, but sufficient backstory to all the ass kicking.

"BLACK MAY HAVE OPENED THE DOOR FOR A FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER RENAISSANCE, BUT ATARI'S TIMESHIFT IS LOOKING TO START A REVOLUTION"

Our brief time with *TimeShift* was very promising. Modern videogaming should be about choice – the ability to decide how to go about any given situation is crucial as we enter the next generation, and *TimeShift* has this important ideology at its core. The first genuinely essential 360 first-person shooter? Only 'time' will tell...



■ Explosions are awesome. Explosions featuring lots of blood are even better.

■ Rewind time and watch this poor fool's guts explode time and time again.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Atari's shooter features some serious hardware with which to deal out hot death. Kyle Peschel talks us through *TimeShift*'s impressive arsenal...

STALKER RIFLE

"The Stalker Rifle is the standard issue assault rifle of the Imperial Foot Soldier. The weapon is lightweight, portable and combines the effectiveness of machine gun capabilities with a grenade launcher."

SWARM GRENADE

"The Swarm Grenade is the first intelligent search-and-destroy weapon. It's a smart device that has the ability to track and eliminate targets. It's activated by throwing. Once active, it extends two mechanical wings and initiates thrusters that provide lift and directional movement. An optical lens then searches for and locates enemy targets. Once a target is in sight, the grenade moves into close range and hovers over it, firing until it's done."

ECHO RIFLE

"This contains a laser pointer that measures the distance between the target and the weapon. Once the target has been acquired, co-ordinates are sent to the rifle's "brain" which keeps the weapon on target. The laser may reveal the shooter's location, but this is outweighed by accuracy at long range." So, the greatest sniper rifle.

KRONE KANNON

"K2 has a 40-meter barrel and a 52cm-high rocket propelled shell. It's the most devastating weapon in existence and can be transported easily, yet its main use is for stationary cliffside defence of military installations. It is now used against slow Zeppelin warships."

PLASMA TURRET

"This large auto-cannon is a semi-open turret that rotates on a 360-degree axis and can tilt to a 45-degree angle. It is often mounted on zeppelin warships and anti-aircraft installations. The weapon has a seat for its operator and a protective shell that provides cover."

PREVIEW | **MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON** | XBOX/MULTIFORMAT

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON



■ We all know that someone's going to end up in that big fan back



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FRIENDS REUNITED



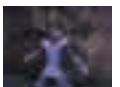
MK2



MK3



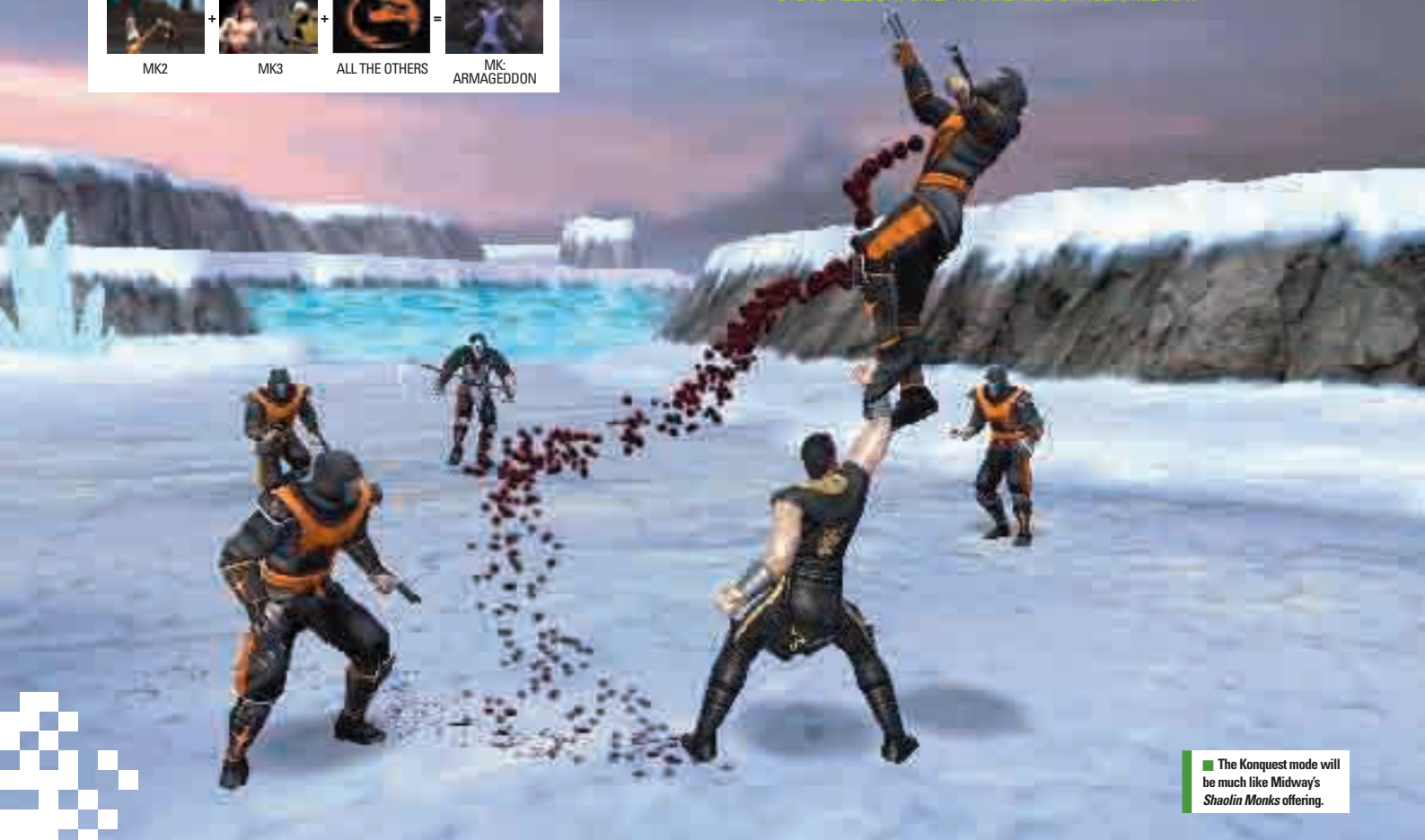
ALL THE OTHERS



MK:
ARMAGEDDON

**"WE'RE EAGER TO RAISE THE BAR FOR
THE FIGHTING GENRE YET AGAIN"**

STEVE ALLISON, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, MIDWAY



■ The Konquest mode will be much like Midway's *Shaolin Monks* offering.

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON

XBOX/MULTIFORMAT

KOMBAT PROFILE

■ Plagued by controversy and hounded by the press, the *Mortal Kombat* series has been under scrutiny nearly every step of the way. Fortunately, in the light of more interesting things to whinge about, the press has left well alone for the last few titles and progress has been made without hindrance.

HISTORY

- MK: SHAOLIN MONKS 2005 [Multi]
- MK: DECEPTION 2004 [Multi]
- MK: DEADLY ALLIANCE 2003 [Multi]

■ We don't know who this bloody big, snowy chap is, but we like him lots.



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2 (TBC Online)

CONCEPT

■ Compete in the *Mortal Kombat* tournament once again, only this time you'll have access to every character ever created for the series.

MIDWAY GOES ALL IN



Everyone's been wondering exactly where the *Mortal Kombat* series was going to go next. Midway has gone in near every direction with its famously gory fighter; from action-adventure title, right through to dressing it up as a chess game, it seems as if there's nothing that won't be attempted in an effort to snag those that are yet to be caught by the adorable level of violence achieved by the franchise.

Of course, *Mortal Kombat* has always been at its best when sticking to what it knows, which is regular, one-on-one, best-of-three-bouts combat. It's something that's been offered with varying levels of success over the years, but now Midway has the chance to tuck any doubt away and show us what *Mortal Kombat* can really be.

Touted as 'the final chapter this generation is going to see', it looks as though all the stops have been pulled out and everything that can possibly be thrown at *Armageddon* will be. It has been claimed that most of the fighters – boss or otherwise – that have ever featured in the games will be playable, as well as a few new unfamiliar faces. This is quite a claim and would suggest that there may be more than 50 combatants contained within the title, though you can be sure some are going to be a real pain to actually unlock and that some new version of The Krypt will once again promise plenty and deliver little but artwork on the majority of occasions. Not that we'll mind trawling through to get to our favourites – we've certainly missed horribly cheap Sektor with his homing

"WITH LESSONS LEARNED AND A WHOLE HEAP OF FRESH POTENTIAL, ARMAGEDDON COULD WELL BE THE PERFECT WAY TO WAVE GOODBYE TO THE CURRENT GENERATION"

missile attack and teleport uppercut. We can't wait to see him again.

Also promised is a create-your-own-fatality mode, which sounds suspiciously as if it'll go one of two ways: it'll either be an interesting and innovative addition to the title, or be utter 'krap'. We'll have to reserve judgment on this for now, as the exact means of Fatality control is still under wraps. Hopefully, if Midway delivers on its promises, we could be looking at a feature that enhances play suitably and provides an extra arm to the promotion of gore that's obviously going to take place.

Adding to this list of new features is the ability to create your own fighter and, after adequate training, no doubt take them for a spin online and challenge others to a claret-filled ruck. Character creation like this has been attempted many times before and we've all learnt that it's extremely difficult to do well. *Soul Calibur III*, for instance, was

full of promise, but the characters that were made using the items available often turned out to be a little soulless and most were quickly forgotten, replaced by the more recognisable standard characters.

It's sad, but in truth the series has been lacking over the last year or so and despite many bonuses and extras has provided a few fairly middling experiences. Fortunately, with lessons learned and a whole heap of fresh potential, *Armageddon* could well be the perfect way to wave goodbye to the current generation of consoles, and set about paving the way for the goodies that the series can offer us in the future.

EXTRA KREDIT

The Konquest mode has featured a couple of times in *Mortal Kombat* titles, and each time it's seen improvement. Starting out as a basic way of training yourself and learning the background of each character, it soon became a small RPG-esque game in its own right. Now, in *Armageddon* we'll be looking at yet another approach and we could be seeing a mode that's not dissimilar to how *Shaolin Monks* turned out. Though, with the number of characters that are going to be on offer, this could well be the most substantial part of the game.

ROGUE TROOPER



■ The glowing-eyed blue mentalist look is just so now. Love that mohawk!



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

A DISH BEST SERVED COLD



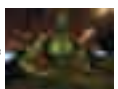
+



x



=



THE TERMINATOR

RAMBO

THE SMURFS

ROGUE TROOPER

"ROGUE TROOPER BLENDS INTENSE, THIRD-PERSON ACTION AND NEXT-GENERATION STEALTH"

EIDOS PRESS RELEASE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Rebellion is a UK-based developer established by brothers Jason and Chris Kingsley. In June 2000, Rebellion bought the science-fiction comic *2000AD* and its entire portfolio of characters. *Rogue Trooper* is the firm's second game from the *2000AD* stable, following 2003's *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death*.

HISTORY

- **SNIPER ELITE** 2005 [Multi]
- **JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH** 2003 [Multi]
- **RAINBOW SIX: LONE WOLF** 2002 [PSOne]

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC, PS2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Rebellion
RELEASE: 21 April
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 Online)

CONCEPT

■ The air is poison. The government is corrupt. The people are at war. We need a hero. Do you have one in blue?

HE'S BIG, HE'S BLUE, AND HE'S VERY PISSED OFF

■ **Assess the future of our planet using comic books alone, and the findings would drive you to despair.** These are worlds where people can fly, control minds, and shoot laser beams out of their heads, yet not one writer gives Earth a snowball's chance in hell of surviving the next few hundred years intact. Its inhabitants may well be 'super', but the planet certainly isn't.

Wherever you look, Earth seems to be cursed, scorched, tarred or feathered, and with daily headlines announcing plagues of killer birds and western Europe's imminent destruction by rising tides, their observations seem more astute every day. What's wrong with that? Given the choice between the *Daily Mail's* future and that presented in the popular *2000AD* comic strip, we'd go for the comic every time. And why? It's simple. Big mutants with guns.

Rogue Trooper is one such tale. Set on Nu-Earth, a planet ravaged by war and poisonous gas, the rival armies of the Norts and the Southers are locked in a titanic struggle. In a bid to win the war, the Southers create a battalion of Genetic Infantrymen (GIs): super-soldiers who

are impervious to the planet's harmful atmosphere. However, the GIs are betrayed by their commanding officer, and, after witnessing the annihilation of his regiment in the Quartz Zone Massacre, one GI goes AWOL, hell-bent on avenging the deaths of his allies. The Rogue Trooper is born.

Adapted from the *2000AD* comic, *Rogue Trooper* brings with it some baggage. Avid fans are seldom satisfied when their objects of affection are moulded into new shapes, but from what we've seen, this looks to be one of those rare, happy exceptions.

Rebellion has nailed Rogue's looks. All blue skin, no shirt, and bulging muscles, he makes for a striking figure when compared to the bland 'army guys' that populate so many third-person action titles. Accompanying you on your journey are three of your fallen comrades, their personalities recorded onto encoded biochips and implanted into Rogue's various

kit. Gunnar, Helm and Bagman become the voices of your gun, helmet and bag, each offering advice and services.

It's an innovation offering extra options on how you play the game; the environments have been designed with this in mind. Rebellion promises levels that don't hold your hand and point to the nearest exit; Rogue is free to roam and explore the myriad routes and tactics available to him.

Whether you prefer a quiet, creeping kill, or a rockets-first-questions-later approach, Rogue is up to the challenge with impressive heavy weaponry and dramatic, stealth-based kill moves. Plus the promise of a four-player Online mode.

This is shaping up to be a most intriguing title, and with a big-budget, Hollywood adaptation on the way, this may be your last chance to appreciate *Rogue Trooper* before some studio fat cat re-shaves Vin Diesel and paints him blue.

"REBELLION HAS ROGUE'S LOOKS NAILED; ALL BLUE SKIN, NO SHIRT, AND BULGING MUSCLES, MAKES HIM A STRIKING FIGURE"

THREE'S A CROWD

Guns, bags and helmets are always useful items in games, but when they contain the wits and expertise of three of your former allies they become truly indispensable. Each item will have an individual personality, dispense advice and offer access to specific skills. For example, Rogue's helmet, Helm, can be used to hack into computer systems, and, in the most impressive example we've seen, Rogue's gun, Gunnar, can be set up as a sentry to mow down interfering enemies while you take care of business. The full uses of each item have yet to be confirmed, but what we've seen so far points toward cunning innovation rather than pointless trickery.

■ Should you tire of wanton destruction, Rogue can execute stealth-based Kill Moves.



LOCOROCO

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Platform
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Take a bulbous yellow ball around a level, feed it fruit to make it bigger, and get it to sing cute little songs. Oh, the joys of simplicity.

THIS IS HOW WE ROLL...

Videogames are capable of fuelling many emotions, but few can genuinely make you happy to be alive. All manner of characters have sprung from the many vivid imaginations knocking around within development studios, all trying to appeal to the masses that little bit more than the others by making increasingly mean/cool/lovable beings.

They are probably putting too much thought into it, though. It's been proven on many occasions now that a crude circle with eyes and a large grinning mouth is capable of becoming iconic just as easily as your Master Chief types and it looks as though *LocoRoco* may be about to prove this true once again. A single glance at the screenshots on this page should be enough to convince almost anyone with a heart that there's a lot of glee to be taken from this little title, and encourage them to begin the harvest.

So, we guess you're wondering what the hell a *LocoRoco* is. Well, they're adorable little slime balls that crave tasty fruit to satisfy their hunger. By rocking the environment left and right with the L and R buttons, you can move these slimy lumps of happy around obstacles to find the fruits that are hidden around the levels. Each fruit you manage to consume will cause your *LocoRoco* to grow a bit bigger allowing it to progress through different sections and conquer the more complex obstacles to reach other hidden areas where further goodies reside.

This looks like some kind of dream; an incredible Dali-style yellow goo dream.



"IT'S BEEN PROVEN THAT A CRUDE CIRCLE WITH EYES AND A LARGE GRINNING MOUTH IS CAPABLE OF BECOMING ICONIC JUST AS EASILY AS YOUR MASTER CHIEF TYPES"

And that's it, really. Of course, foolishly bumping into other objects with a far smaller surface area than your own *LocoRoco* (sharp things like thorns, splinters and anything else that isn't made up of 90 per cent water) will relieve you of some of that extra slime you've accumulated. And should you have the need to slip through a small gap, a single push of a button will result in you separating into all your different parts so that you can dribble through easily before rejoining with the other bits of yourself when you arrive on the other side.

To be honest, this is the sort of title that we'd normally expect to see arriving on the DS – it does have all the necessary cute and cuddly elements – but we're certainly not going to complain about the forthcoming arrival of this treat for our portable PlayStations. As great as it is to have epic *Grand Theft Auto* titles and the like, there are times when a bus ride demands the accessibility and charm that *LocoRoco* appears to have. Seeing it in its all-singing all-smiling glory is something we're looking forward to greatly – we'll let you know how it goes...



Not having any feet makes stopping, well, impossible for these little rollers.



HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V



ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY THE HERO

Things change – it's something that each of us has to come to terms with. It's whether things change for the better or worse that actually requires some questioning. *Heroes Of Might And Magic* has been making its contribution to gaming for the best part of ten years now, and previous developer 3DO managed to make its games a way of life for many PC gamers. Now, though, Ubisoft has snatched up the publishing rights and development has been entrusted to Nival Interactive. *Heroes Of Might And Magic V* is going to be a slightly different step for the franchise that's normally so sure-footed.

Though at a glance, actual gameplay isn't as different as first thought. Play will still be faction-based (of which there are now six), you're still going to be dealing with dragons and the like, and the skills and abilities number into the hundreds.

Although this may all sound a little familiar, something that's certain is that we're going to be seeing something of an update. Each new instalment of the game to date has presented a number of new features – often improving upon the multi-player aspects or streamlining gameplay

– that have satisfied the existing fanbase and attracted a fair amount of new interest, but the actual feel of the games has always been the same. It has been this way for a long while, and to be honest it was starting to feel a little, well, stagnant. The fact that new life is to be breathed into the franchise is undeniably a good thing.

We'll be experiencing a far more modern style this time around, and although the streamlining efforts we've seen in previous titles have had varying success, it's obvious that we'll see an interface that's far friendlier to newcomers. Although still catering for the hardcore fans, *Might And Magic V* will be ensuring that newcomers aren't scared away by a mass of menus and a horde of +1s. Also, in an effort to give the game the style demanded by today's gamer, French illustrator and graphic novelist Olivier Ledroit (of *The Black Moon Chronicles* fame) has been handed a number of key characters and locations to work on. Nival is certainly not taking the acquisition of the much-loved *Heroes Of Might And Magic* licence lightly.

In short, we should be seeing a title that addresses the niggles that have haunted

the series since day one. We've been told that the inconsistencies in the story will be addressed. All the factions will now have special abilities (those that were constantly beaten by the cheating Neropolis before, will be glad to hear this) and with any luck we should see the best version to date. Of course, we're still going to have to find a way to make the turn times of other gamers pass a little quicker – watching players that aren't even in the room wander around a map is surely one of the least fun things that exists. But if you're after the true *Heroes Of Might And Magic* experience, this is something that's always had to be tolerated, and the time can be spent usefully, creating tactics and/or hot beverages.

Hopefully, with the improvements that have been promised, the waiting will be a little more bearable and we'll be seeing yet another successful instalment that lures an even larger crowd into the *Might And Magic* universe.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Russia
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Nival Interactive
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-8

CONCEPT

■ Yet more turn-based strategy from one of the most respected online games available – only this time, things are looking a little different.

PLAY NICE

Although the first title in the series managed to earn itself a hefty following, it was only when the second game gave us online play that the greatness of *Might And Magic* became apparent. *Heroes Of Might And Magic V* plans to continue this tradition and will offer five different Online modes for you and up to seven other players to take part in. Of course, the more players you have, the longer these games are going to take. An eight-player game is likely to pretty much consume your entire day. Somehow, this is likely to still be enjoyable.

“WATCHING PLAYERS THAT AREN'T EVEN IN THE ROOM WANDER AROUND A MAP HAS ALWAYS HAD TO BE TOLERATED AND THE TIME CAN BE USEFULLY SPENT CREATING TACTICS AND/OR HOT BEVERAGES”

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Russia-based Nival Interactive specialises in PC titles, largely because the demand for console gaming is pretty low in Russia. The moment the next *Might And Magic* was up for grabs, the developer went all-out to get a hold of it – the whole team are big fans.

HISTORY

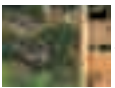
- SILENT STORM 2003 [PC]
- BLITZKRIEG 2003 [PC]
- ETHERLORDS 2002 [PC]

“THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A TRUE HERO WILL ENTICE PLAYERS TO BECOME A PART OF THE MIGHT AND MAGIC UNIVERSE”

ALAIN CORRE, MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR EUROPE, UBISOFT

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MIGHTIER MAGIC



+



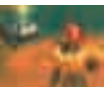
2D

+



STYLE

=



HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V

■ The simple turn-based combat system is certain to feel familiar to *M&M* veterans.

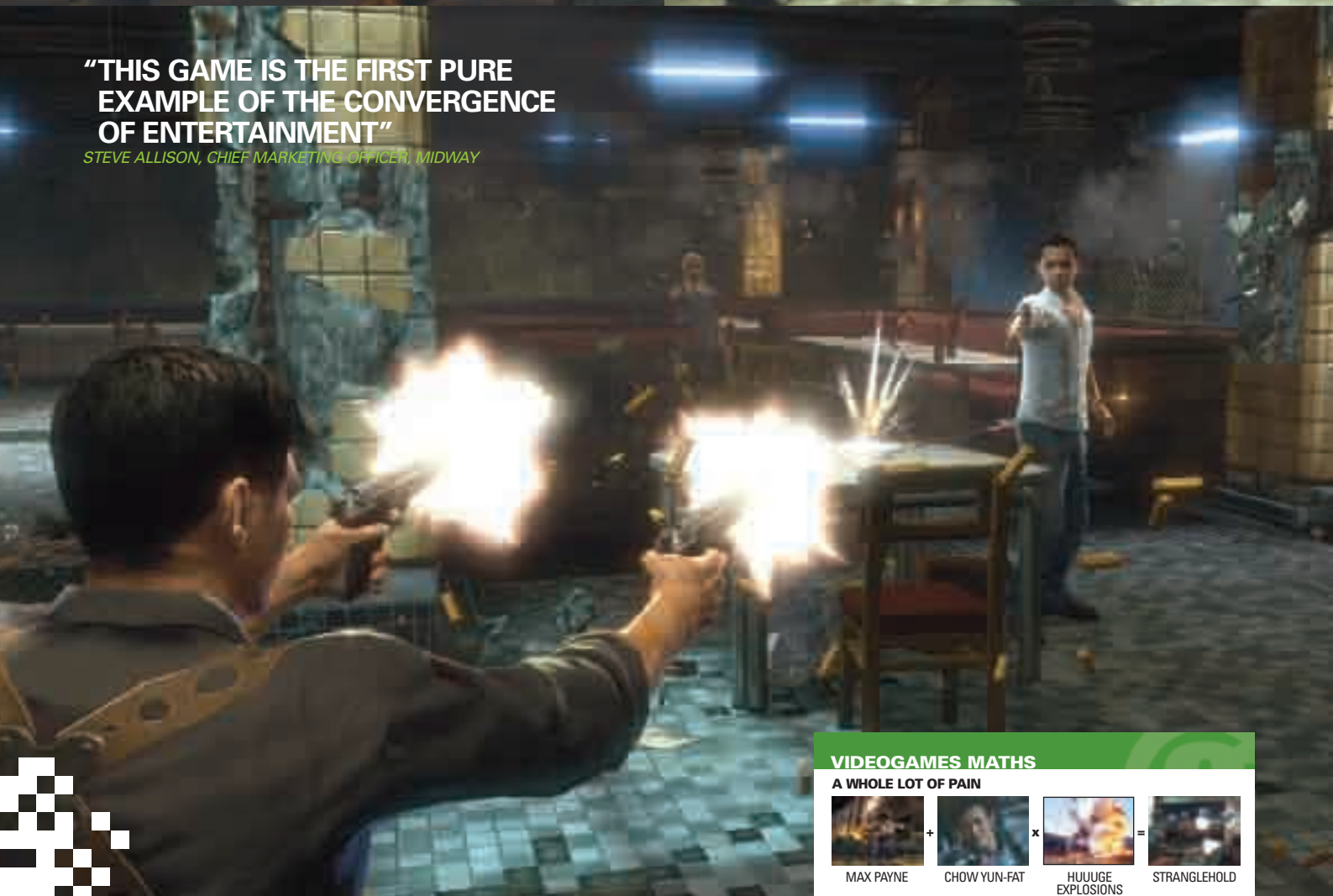
STRANGLEHOLD



■ *Stranglehold* looks to be as brutal and destructive as the best kung fu movies.

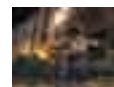
**"THIS GAME IS THE FIRST PURE
EXAMPLE OF THE CONVERGENCE
OF ENTERTAINMENT"**

STEVE ALLISON, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, MIDWAY

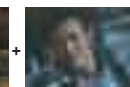


VIDEOGAMES MATHS

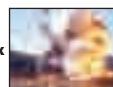
A WHOLE LOT OF PAIN



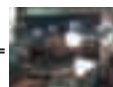
MAX PAYNE



CHOW YUN-FAT



HUUUGE
EXPLOSIONS



STRANGLEHOLD

DEVELOPER PROFILE

Midway has been a successful publisher for decades, although its development heyday was back at gaming's formative stages in the Eighties. It's perhaps most famous for its Mortal Kombat series, the last instalment of which is due out on current-gen consoles later this year.

HISTORY

- MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS 2005 [MULTI]
- AREA 51 2005 [MULTI]
- CRUIS'N USA 1996 [N64]

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PS3, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Winter '06
GENRE: Action/
 Third-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

John Woo and Chow Yun-Fat collaborate with Midway to bring us this next-generation action game.

WE'VE BEEN WOO-ED

Cinema and videogames have been coming together on many fronts over the past few years. Now that technology has evolved to the point where realistic likenesses are possible, a number of actors have appeared in 'game of the movie' titles (or occasionally in something of their own). *Stranglehold*, though, aims to take cinematic convergence to a whole new level. Directed by John Woo, developed by Midway and starring Chow Yun-Fat, this is about as close to a movie as a game has ever been in its development ethos. Indeed, the focus here is upon experiencing the excitement of a Woo-directed action movie first-hand, an endeavour Woo himself is reputedly very excited to be a part of.

Stranglehold stars the same cop as the John Woo movie *Hard Boiled: Inspector Tequila*. He is instantly recognisable on screen as Chow Yun-Fat, and the characters that we've seen so far are all so superbly modelled and animated that they look lifelike. Indeed, overall the look of the game is superb. Although the action is intense, and almost everything in the game's environments is destructible, the action never slows and the level of model detail throughout is notably lavish. It seems that,

using the fully interactive scenery, the player will be able to execute the sort of fantastic environment-based stunts seen in the best kung fu movies. We're holding out for the banister moment from the beginning of *Hard Boiled*, and given that we've already seen something very similar in the trailer, we shouldn't be disappointed.

Storywise, there's nothing exceptional here. Inspector Tequila spends his time fighting the gangs of Hong Kong and Tokyo, in an explosive, all-guns-blazing fashion. His ex-wife, however, is kidnapped halfway through, meaning that Tequila has to decide how to divide his time between fighting gangmen and going after his family. The duty-versus-personal-desire theme may not be original, but if the player had input in his decision-making it could make for some excellent story points – unfortunately it's not yet clear whether events will be entirely scripted or not.

In terms of environments, it's clear that they'll form a big part of the action. We know that Tequila will travel from Hong Kong to Chicago, and so far we've seen a teahouse, a museum with destructible exhibits, the requisite warehouse and outdoor marketplace scenes and a hotel lobby. The power of the next-gen technology on which the game runs means that surroundings can be interacted with to an extent never before realised in a game.

We know that cinematic games can work and we're keen to see what Midway can do with the technology. It's also an important step in game-movie interaction – seeing directors take an active part in a game's development is encouraging and bodes well for the future of film-licensed or film-themed interactive entertainment. Although it's not expected to be released until the end of the year, it already looks polished – we look forward to playing it at E3.

"PLAYERS CAN EXECUTE THE ENVIRONMENT-BASED STUNTS OF THE BEST KUNG FU MOVIES"

TAKE IT SLOW

In addition to the very 'John Woo' direction of the game (lots of dual gun-wielding and things blowing up), there's another feature in *Stranglehold* that has become common in both games and film over the past few years – bullet time. Apparently we're supposed to call it Tequila Time, but that reminds us of *Total Overdose* to a less-than-comfortable extent, so we're not going to. In a very 'Max Payne' way, *Inspector Tequila* can slow things down for a bit to perform precision targeting and admire the pretty explosions (and they are very pretty indeed). It really adds to the kung fu-movie feel of the game and we're assured that it will be essential to gameplay as opposed to just a gorgeous effect.

The stunts in the game are all properly motion captured and augmented by some truly lovely effects.



MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM



■ It's not just dogs that hunt in packs, you know. With Wi-Fi, you and up to four friends can take on the beasts.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 Wi-Fi)

CONCEPT

■ Capcom's critically acclaimed hunt-'em-up makes its portable debut with new missions, a four-player Wi-Fi mode and crisp visuals.

MONSTERS IN MY POCKET

■ The concept of *Monster Hunter* is both incredibly simple and extremely appealing. Build a hunter, choose his or her weapons, and then embark on quests to fight and capture enormous beasts with a group of like-minded companions. It's a game about teamwork, triumph over adversity and eight-foot swords. So when the news filtered through that there was to be no Online mode for *Monster Hunter Freedom*, it was met with a distinct air of disappointment.

Keen to counter these worries, Capcom is placing a lot of emphasis on the four-player Wi-Fi mode that is sure to occupy many a monster-hunting hour. The sense of camaraderie that a group of four PSP-owning friends could potentially muster as they attempt to overcome a land shark or dinosaur is immense, but whether that situation is ever likely to arise is a completely different matter.

Thankfully then, the single-player game appears to have had all the care and attention in the world lavished upon it, and visually it wouldn't look at all out of place on the PlayStation2. The clarity, crispness and detail on the character models – particularly on the monsters – is superb, making *Freedom* yet another exhibition for the machine's abilities.

The control and combat also translate surprisingly well to the handheld format; the D-pad has camera movement covered while the analogue nub and face buttons provide a more-than-adequate control over all the fighting. A few drops in frame-rate aside (which should almost certainly be fixed before release), the *Monster Hunter* experience has not been compromised for its handheld debut.

In fact, despite the lack of any online gameplay, *Monster Hunter Freedom* offers the most comprehensive representation of the *Hunter* series so far. The village hub and farming aspects have also been tweaked and added to, which goes toward lending more weight to the single-player

game, while entering into dialogue with the townsfolk leads to business opportunities, eventually increasing the prosperity of the whole area.

It's something of a disappointment that these evolving village environments will not actually be explorable by other *Monster Hunters*, à la *Animal Crossing*, as they would then perform a dual role – both as mission hub and digital showcase. Still, with PlayStation Portable online gaming still very much in its infancy, the four-player Wi-Fi options coupled with quite beautiful graphics mean that *Monster Hunter Freedom* should be one of, if not the definitive PSP RPG when it arrives later in the year.



"IN FACT, DESPITE THE LACK OF ANY ONLINE GAMEPLAY, FREEDOM OFFERS THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE HUNTER YET"



■ "You look so much smaller on television." This particular hunter immediately wished he was dead.



TOP SPIN 2



■ The character models in *Top Spin 2* don't match those in 2K Sports' *NBA 2K6*, but look, they're still pretty 'ace'.

DETAILS

FORMAT:
Xbox 360, GBA, DS
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER:
2K Sports
DEVELOPER:
In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ A next-gen update of everybody's second favourite tennis game, complete with shiny visuals and even more emphasis on Xbox Live.

2K SPORTS LOOKS FOR AN ADVANTAGE OVER SEGA

Tennis traditionally translates to the videogame form rather well. From its origins in the mighty *Pong*, through to *Super Tennis* on the SNES and the magnificent *Virtua Tennis*, the scope for frenetic multiplayer action has always been generous. Having made inroads into the online potential of the genre with the Xbox's *Top Spin*, 2K Sports is looking to offer the definitive grass court experience when the sequel arrives on the Xbox 360 in the coming months.

For an Xbox 360 game, the visuals in *Top Spin 2* are slightly disappointing and certainly don't reach the heights of stablemate *NBA 2K6*'s character models or delicious cloth physics. The stars of the professional tennis tour are instantly recognisable, however, and the different court surfaces are picked out beautifully – a trick the 360 manages entirely effortlessly.

The real meat of any tennis sim is the matchplay; excellent collision detection and speed are an absolute must. Unfortunately, at this stage the gameplay doesn't quite match *Virtua Tennis*' near flawless balance of arcade action and realism. Although the difference in shot selection and power

strokes add layers of depth to the tennis engine, the game isn't fluid enough to take advantage of them. Too often in this early code we saw players not reacting to the ball properly, and the game seemed to select inappropriate shot animations far too often, making the matches unfairly balanced in your opponents' favour. This is compounded by the obscene difficulty of the computer challengers on the standard setting – hopefully this will be addressed for the finished release.

On the court, while *Top Spin 2* isn't quite up to *Virtua Tennis*' standards, there's still satisfaction in hitting a perfect return from a bullet serve, or a perfectly pitched passing shot down the tramlines. The main

advantage 2K Sports' effort possesses, though, is its Grand Slam Tour mode – a fully realised tennis Career mode that makes *Virtua*'s World Tour mini-game marathon seem somewhat facile in comparison.

While taking your digital self through the junior ranks up to the Grand Slam tournaments themselves should provide plenty of substance for single players, if *Top Spin 2* is to succeed on the 360, the Live mode must deliver on everything its predecessor promised. If it's lag free and features tournaments, rankings and champions, and hopefully a Spectator mode, then it should prove extremely popular with anyone hungry for online action with a genuine competitive streak.

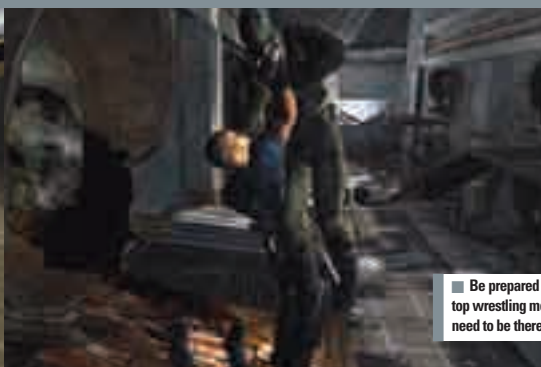


■ Some of the computer opponents can be infuriatingly difficult. But then, if Maria was easy we wouldn't feel the same about her.

"THERE'S STILL A GENUINE SATISFACTION IN HITTING A PERFECT RETURN FROM A BULLET SERVE, OR A PERFECTLY PITCHED PASSING SHOT DOWN THE TRAMLINES"



SPY HUNTER: NOWHERE TO RUN



■ Be prepared for plenty of over-the-top wrestling moves that don't really need to be there. Thanks, Dwayne.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: Terminal Reality
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ Get behind the wheel and leave the driving seat of the Interceptor so you can sort out the NOSTRA corporation again.

WHY RUN WHEN YOU CAN DRIVE?

■ There are a great many titles that have sprung from the arcades.

Over time, some have even managed to blossom into franchises that manage to display enough enhanced graphics and gameplay to tempt us into forgetting the game's humble roots and, at the same time, spare us the feeling that we may well be 'getting on a bit'.

Spy Hunter is one of these titles. Few now recall the arcade version, preferring instead to remember the somewhat average updates that have since been delivered to us over the years. We say average, but then that's possibly a tad harsh.

The games have never really been that disappointing, however, thanks to a fairly linear approach, there hasn't

"YOU'LL ACTUALLY BE ABLE TO LEAVE THE DRIVING SEAT AND TAKE SUPER-SPY ALEX DECK OUT FOR A WALK"



■ We can't believe how much this looks like The Rock. It's uncanny. It's like he's here in the room with us.

been anything put on show that we can champion. Although some fairly decent gameplay elements were displayed with the transforming Interceptor vehicle, we've always been left wanting something just that little bit more.

Now, with *Spy Hunter: Nowhere To Run* on the horizon, there's the new hope that we may well be getting that little bit extra that we've been craving. The key difference here is that you'll actually be able to leave the driving seat and take super-spy Alex Deck (now played by Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson) out for a walk. Third-person action is a first for the series and Terminal Reality has made sure that The Rock's name isn't wasted by incorporating a fair number of suitably harmful melee attacks to bolster the firearm action you'd expect.

Of course, there will obviously be plenty of driving – it's what the series is best known for, after all – and you can expect to see the wondrous Interceptor return once again. It'll turn into a bike, boat and probably a few other things to add to its 'coolness' throughout the game.

Although, regarding previous titles in the franchise, it's been argued that some of the driving may have been considered somewhat ropey, if what we've seen so far is anything to go by, these sections will turn out quite nicely and some high-speed antics should be waiting to test our reflexes in a far superior way than any of the title's forerunners ever managed. These new elements open up many fresh opportunities for Terminal Reality, and it'll be particularly interesting to see exactly how they make use of them and whether or not they fulfil the extra potential that they've managed to create for themselves. Either that, or just deliver the same package once again.



LOSTMAGIC

DETAILS

FORMAT: DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Taito
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ Help rid the world of monsters by tracking down and using the seven magical wands left behind by the 'creator' in this Taito-developed RPG.

PROBABLY DOWN THE BACK OF THE SOFA

LE The DS really has had a tough time of late. Thanks to a large number of titles such as *Meteos* and *Yoshi's Touch & Go*, it's managed to gain a reputation for providing nothing but glorified mini-games – an opinion that's not entirely justified. Although there have, indeed, been many basic titles for the machine, there are also larger, more complex games on offer should you look hard enough. Titles such as *Lost In Blue* and *Trace Memory* have more than proved that Nintendo DS games can have substance, and *Lostmagic* could well be about to add to the list.

Here is an action RPG with a bit of a difference, rather than simply walking around the land, engaging in random battles, you'll be able to switch to an RTS view and control characters and parties by giving them orders with the stylus. This leaves you with many options, as holding certain groups back and ordering tactical attacks could well make this a new breed of RPG adventure – one that couldn't be better suited to Nintendo's handheld.

Not wanting to miss a stylus-based trick, Taito has opted to utilise those unique DS



■ Making good use of the DS and its unique abilities? What a super idea. Good work.

abilities when it comes to casting spells. Rather than a simple selection process, symbols will have to be drawn onto the screen before the spell is activated – something that's bound to annoy unless implemented properly – and there will be all manner of spell-mixing and testing that doesn't sound dissimilar to *Eternal Darkness* and its glyph experimentation feature.

Also mentioned is the fact that monsters can be collected, combined and trained to attack – another element that reeks of a certain other large franchise – but with

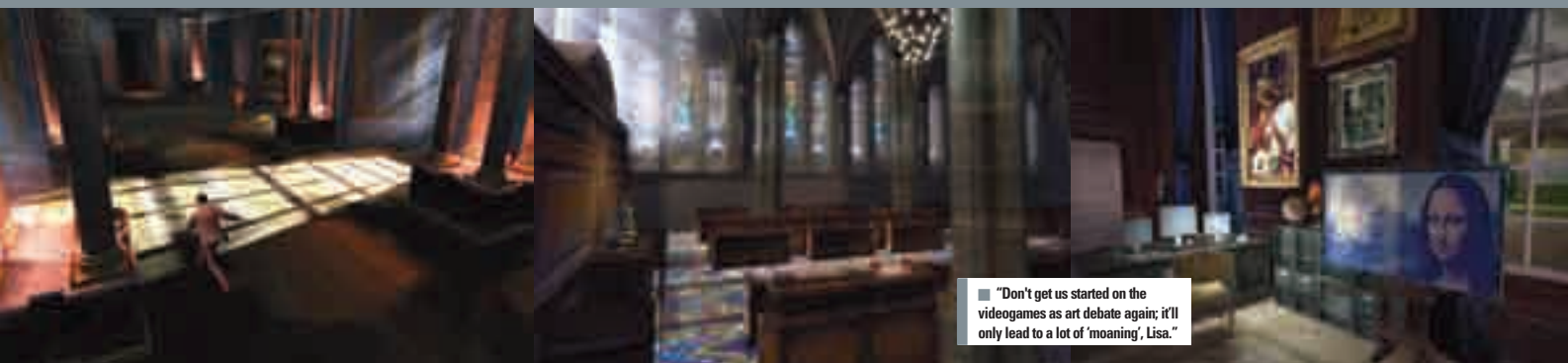
Wi-Fi connectivity promised, together with our obvious love for battling and trading with friends, it could all work out very well and Ubisoft may be rewarded for taking a chance on a Japanese title such as this. After all, most of the best DS games are currently not destined for these shores and those not keen on importing are missing out. Maybe titles such as *Lostmagic* making their way across the world could be the start of something great – only if it delivers on its promises and lives up to its potential, of course.

“LOSTMAGIC COULD WORK OUT VERY WELL AND UBISOFT MAY BE REWARDED FOR TAKING A CHANCE ON A JAPANESE TITLE”





THE DA VINCI CODE



■ "Don't get us started on the videogames as art debate again; it'll only lead to a lot of 'moaning', Lisa."

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, GC, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: The Collective
RELEASE: May
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ The game of the movie of the book, and the only place you can control Tom Hanks outside *Toy Story* on the PSOne.

SILAS THE VIRUS

Normally, **games™** steers clear of licensed movie fodder, but when that fodder is based on the movie of the best-selling novel of all time, surely it's worth a look. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has been one of this century's major success stories – a little-known author writes a book about monks and is now incredibly rich.

The movie, due out in May and directed by Ron Howard, is shaping up nicely with Tom Hanks taking the lead role of Robert Langdon, the character players will take control of in the game. Quite typically, considering the book's subject matter of secret societies and conspiracy, 2K Games is remaining tight-lipped about how the game will shape up. We're promised 'action-orientated suspense', which could mean a more serious *Fahrenheit* (a good thing) or a daft shoot-'em-up in the vein of *24* (a less good thing). As long as there are no levels

"THE SUBJECT MATTER IS SCREAMING FOR AN INTELLIGENT VIDEOGAME, AND BROKEN SWORD'S CONTENT HAS MANY PARALLELS WITH THE DA VINCI CODE"

based on docks or in warehouses (complete with large cargo containers) we'll be happy; finding a movie-licensed game without them is next to impossible.

The team that worked on *Marc Ecko's Getting Up*, The Collective, is behind the videogame adaptation, and is joined by designer Charles Cecil, famed for his work on *Broken Sword*. His inclusion is promising; the subject matter is screaming for an intelligent videogame, and *Broken Sword's* content has many parallels with *The Da Vinci Code*, particularly the themes of conspiracy and intrigue.

We hold out a fair amount of hope for this embodiment of the story. There's every

chance that it'll turn out to be awful, but the lack of EA's play-by-numbers approach to movie tie-ins is important for the IP, as is the involvement of Cecil. The environments look spacious and detailed, and the unusual locales of churches and monasteries mean that the game of *The Da Vinci Code* should look and play differently to the majority of titles. There's also the obvious amusement of sprinting about as a digital Tom Hanks – a feature every game should have.

Only time will tell whether the videogame and movie adaptations of this most lucrative of IPs will prove successful, but it's definitely looking more interesting than yet another superhero tie in.



■ We genuinely hope this isn't the end of the line for the success story that has been *The Da Vinci Code*.



■ We can't wait to take control of Tom Hanks, well, somebody has to do it one of these days.



GUILD WARS: FACTIONS



■ This season's must-have accessory is lots and lots of accessories. You heard it here first.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: NCsoft
DEVELOPER: ArenaNet
RELEASE: 28 April
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

CONCEPT

■ A new story, a new world and a whole load of new content, guarantees that you'll be spending another couple of hundred hours in front of your PC.

A REAL NEVER-ENDING STORY...



Anyone that spent any time in Tyria will know of the many wonders.

Aside from the usual MMORPG elements that we've all come to expect, ArenaNet decided to give its title a well-deserved boost up the charts by not charging a penny to take part. This is something we, and many others, abused greatly. Over 200 free hours were put into the development of our Necromancer/Elementalist and our mastery of L20 Bone Horrors knew no bounds. Of course, the missions have played their part for most by now and the real competition is found in Guild Battles where, incidentally, Europe gets continually punished by everyone, and Korea and the US fight it out for the 'favour of the gods'.

This is all likely to change soon, though, as *Guild Wars: Factions* is on its way, giving us all a new reason to quest with complete strangers, and trade expensive magical swords for small vials of dye that we desperately need to colour our currently unsightly and mismatched boots.

Taking place in an Asian-inspired land called Cantha, *Factions* is looking to be far more than the expansion we were expecting. So much so, in fact, that it's actually a standalone game and doesn't need the original to be played. Two all-new professions – Ritualist and Assassin – force us to question our now stagnant second profession once again, and an extra 300 skills, 50 locales and 100 creatures will become available to *Faction* owners, meaning that this 'expansion' actually

features the same amount of content as the original campaign.

However, for those that do own the original game, the two lands will be linked by boat and you'll be able to travel between them at any time so as to take advantage of all that the games have to offer – a perk for those who have been slaving away in the first title for some time – but with the mass of new content and game types that ArenaNet has planned for us, this is unlikely to put new players at any real disadvantage and we could well be seeing *Guild Wars* back at the top of the charts.



"TWO ALL-NEW PROFESSIONS – RITUALIST AND ASSASSIN – FORCE US TO QUESTION OUR NOW STAGNANT SECOND PROFESSION"



■ A stand-alone expansion for *Guild Wars*, *Factions* brings with it a whole new reason to go MMO.



SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1 (Online TBC)

CONCEPT

Gabe Logan returns, this time in portable form for his fifth *Syphon Filter* outing. Expect more running, gunning and stealthing, and a sub-Hollywood Clancy-inspired plot.

LOGAN'S RUN

Originally appearing on the PSOne at the height of Solid Snake fever, *Syphon Filter* was a franchise born out of very little hype. Despite living in the shadow of his blockbuster older brother, the amusingly named Gabe Logan carved out quite a nice little market for his more action-orientated take on the world of Black Ops and anti-terrorism, until the wretched *Omega Strain* darkened the PlayStation2's door that is. Keen to rectify this blot on Mr Logan's copybook, with *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror* Sony has offered Gabe one last chance to make it big, and decided on the PSP as the perfect platform to showcase his many talents.

Anyone expecting something blindly original from *Dark Mirror* will inevitably be disappointed, but for a solid third-person action adventure, the new *Syphon Filter* is looking very pleasing indeed. Graphically, the game is very much of the 'second generation' of PSP titles – moving away from the nasty jaggies that blighted the first batch of releases – and depicts environments with a sense of scale not normally associated with a portable videogame. Logan has access to the usual selection of high-tech weaponry and gadgetry (read: a Sam Fisher-style machine gun and Sam Fisher-style vision modes), the guards behave like you would expect – with differing levels of awareness and the ability to find cover – and in a perfect world Gabe will still run like he's halfway through a sex change operation.

Shooting terrorists in hallways – the staple of any decent action game.



“THERE'S NO REASON FOR DARK MIRROR TO BE ANYTHING LESS THAN A FRONTRUNNER IN THE RACE FOR PSP SUPREMACY”

The worry with any PSP title that would normally require camera control is always the same. The lack of a second analogue stick can turn potential excellence into an unplayable mess; running into the screen, relying on auto targeting and failing to locate enemies does not a good adventure make. Sony will hopefully be aware of the system's limitations and ensure that the *Syphon Filter* experience is not compromised by these most aggravating factors.

With an Online mode that allows the player to create his or her own agent with

which to take on the world, as well as stellar visuals and the backing of a strong franchise, there's no reason for *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror* to be anything less than a frontrunner in the race for PSP supremacy. Handheld online gaming is beginning to take off in a big way, and Sony will undoubtedly be hoping that Gabe and his agency buddies can lead the way onto the PSP battlefield. With strong competition from *Splinter Cell*, however, we'll just have to wait and see who is actually going to triumph as the 'essential' portable Black Ops agent.



The mix of action and stealth has always been *Syphon Filter's* appeal.



PREVIEW FEATURE | **LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND**



LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

CRYSTAL DYNAMICS FINALLY PUTS LARA BACK WHERE SHE BELONGS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics
RELEASE: 7 April (PS2), Spring 2006 (Other Formats)
GENRE: Action-Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Following a quite spectacular fall from grace over the last ten years, the *Tomb Raider* series is back with us under new development and with a fresh back-to-basics ethos.

HISTORY

Tomb Raider II made the series and its heroine two of the most recognisable institutions in videogames. Sadly, however, the series has lost more and more integrity with each subsequent iteration.

Despite the *Tomb Raider* series' sad decline in both quality and popularity since *Tomb Raider II*'s phenomenal rise to fame in 1997, Lara Croft remains one of the most important and recognisable figures in videogames. No subsequent female game character has seen such fame or adoration from within the gaming audience, let alone outside it. She is, in many ways, the perfect female action hero: undeniably sexy, extremely competent and, crucially, British. For her fans especially, it has been desperately saddening to see her starring in increasingly sub-standard cash cows over the last five years, culminating with the terrific disappointment that was *Angel Of Darkness* in 2003 – which is why it is perhaps understandable that we, as fans, could not help but approach *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend* with a certain degree of trepidation.

Quite incredibly, though, seeing and playing *Tomb Raider: Legend* at length managed to dispel not only that trepidation, but pretty much all of the accumulated disappointment with the series that had built up within us over the years. Lara Croft has been put back where she belongs. By the time we discovered the entrance to the first ancient tomb hidden behind a waterfall in the midst of the lush green first level, we had been considerably reassured by the game's clear emphasis on exploration, ease of control and classic puzzle solving.



Given the game's magnetic good looks even on the PS2, it's clear that a lot of love and attention has been lavished upon this title by its new developer, Crystal Dynamics.

"The whole philosophy of *Tomb Raider: Legend* is 'back to basics'," says Greg Hounson, a senior producer on the game, "and for that we had to build these wonderful tomb levels. One of the design goals for *Legend* was to create these environments which are highly expansive, exotic and fun to play.

"Another of our goals was to re-integrate the puzzle solving – that's what made *Tomb Raider* so great in the first place, and you'll

**"FIRST AND FOREMOST WE
NEEDED TO MAKE SURE THAT
WE LOOKED AFTER LARA"**

GREG HOUNSON, SENIOR PRODUCER



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Crystal Dynamics has never worked on a *Tomb Raider* game before but earned its good reputation through the *Legacy Of Kain* series, of which the Dreamcast's excellent *Soul Reaver* is the undisputed highlight. More recently, the studio released the futuristic FPS *Project: Snowblind* in 2005.

HISTORY

- PROJECT: SNOWBLIND 2005 [Multi]
- LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE 2004 [Multi]
- SOUL REAVER 2 2001 [Multi]

find that there's a lot of puzzle solving within *Tomb Raider: Legend*." And fun to play it is – the wide-open environments and the freedom with which Lara moves around them reminds us a little of Toby Gard's other pet project, *Galleon*.

Subtle lighting gives an indication as to which surfaces Lara can climb, but if something looks possible it usually is possible – Lara leaps precariously about ancient ruins and gorgeous scenery with all the agility of the Prince of Persia. "We didn't want her or the gamer to feel any limitations on her moveset throughout the game," asserts Hounson, "therefore, Crystal developed what we call a fluid movement system which enables freedom within the environments, freedom to explore – it provides a platform-adventure experience which we feel is setting a new benchmark in platforming games."

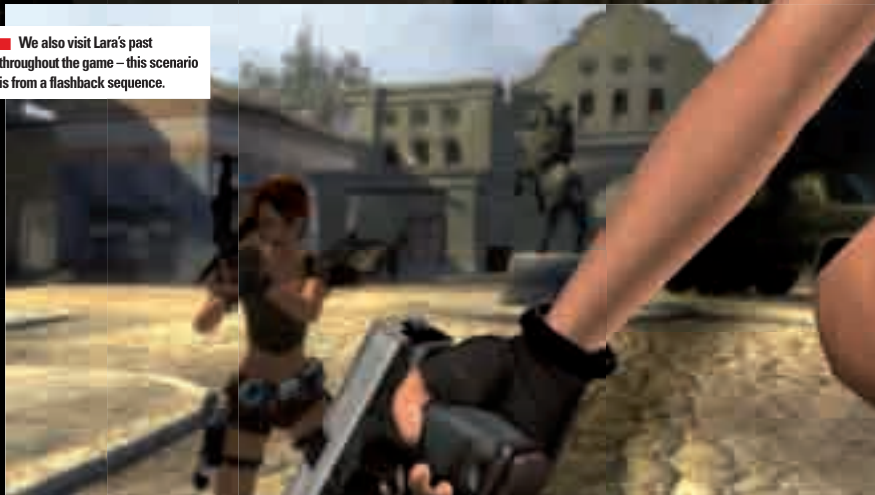
Such a return-to-roots transformation for the series has not, of course, been a simple process. "After *Angel Of Darkness* disappointed a lot of people, especially and

most importantly the gamers, we knew that, as a company, we had to make some quite large steps to reinvigorate the *Tomb Raider* brand," explains Hounson. "We did a lot of research – talking to consumers, finding out what they were most disappointed about with the previous *Tomb Raider* games – and from that we built some very solid design pillars to base *Tomb Raider: Legend* upon."

And in pursuit of these design goals, one of Eidos' first steps was to make the risky decision to take the franchise away from Core, the company founded by Toby Gard in 1994 that had handled every single *Tomb Raider* game up until *Legend*. Giving the licence to someone else was not an easy decision, but as it turned out, even Toby Gard himself was impressed enough with the studio that he joined the project as a senior designer and advisor, leaving his own development studio Confounding Factor in order to do so.

But why choose Crystal Dynamics for the considerable challenge of bringing back *Tomb Raider*? "They were an

■ We also visit Lara's past throughout the game – this scenario is from a flashback sequence.



THE LATEST ACTION HERO

It just wouldn't be *Tomb Raider* without a few endangered species to kill, and sure enough Lara encounters everything from standard human enemies to aggressive jaguars on her explorations. Thankfully, the balance between adventure and combat has been redressed in *Tomb Raider: Legend*. "There's more of an emphasis on adventuring. Every level has an element of combat, but it doesn't take up a very big percentage of the game at all," says Hounson. "Combat does play a part in the game because Lara is an all-out action hero – she loves weapons, she loves firing weapons, so we needed things for her to take out." Thankfully, the combat is really very enjoyable – certain reactive parts of the environment allow for some brilliant action-movie scenes of destruction; in one section we played, Lara kicks a boulder down a steep slope onto some enemies and slides down after it guns blazing, before using it as cover from the next round of fire. Now, that's what we like to see.

LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

■ As an all-action heroine, Lara has access to a wide variety of weapons, vehicles and gadgetry.

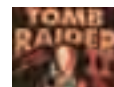
"CRYSTAL DEVELOPED A FLUID MOVEMENT SYSTEM WHICH PROVIDES A PLATFORM-ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE WE FEEL IS SETTING A NEW BENCHMARK IN PLATFORMING GAMES"

GREG HOUNSON, SENIOR PRODUCER

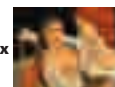
■ There is a lot more emphasis on puzzle solving than in previous instalments.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

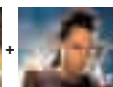
THEY CALL HER MRS TOMBTASTIC



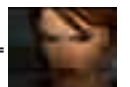
TOMB RAIDER II



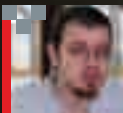
GALLEON



MAGNETIC GOOD LOOKS



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Toby Gard is the man who first founded Core Studios and created the *Tomb Raider* series back in the early Nineties. In 2002, he left Core to create the ambitious *Galleon* with his own studio Confounding Factor, but he has now returned to *Tomb Raider*, joining Crystal Dynamics in a primarily advisory role.

HISTORY

- **GALLEON** 2004 [Xbox]
- **TOMB RAIDER II** 1997 [Multi]
- **TOMB RAIDER** 1996 [PC]

■ Lara loves the water. Details such as dripping clothing and damp footsteps add real polish to *Legend*.

SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED

Although the game's back-to-basics philosophy often sees Lara back in the tombs, there is no lack of variety. **games™** was the first to witness one of the more ambitious new levels in which Lara infiltrates a cocktail party in order to arrange a meeting with a notorious villain. Before long, of course, the party descends into chaos and Lara ruins a perfectly nice dress in an extended gunfight – the feel here is more *James Bond* than classic *Tomb Raider*.

"The designers have been sure that there's complete variation both within and between the environments. You'll see for yourself that the diversity in the level design is phenomenal," boasts Hounson, having shown us the scenario. "You find yourself on several different continents." All-out action heroine she may be, but Lara is a woman of many talents; vehicles also occasionally play a part in the game, although mercifully not in the dreaded 'arbitrary high-speed chase' scenes that prevail in so many Electronic Arts *Bond* titles.

order to make a great *Tomb Raider* game and bring Lara back to where she belongs as one of the all-time great gaming icons."

Ms Croft certainly has the look of an icon. Crystal Dynamics' considerable technological ability has finally given her the face to match her image, and with Toby Gard keeping a close eye on 'his' Lara's look and feel, it finally seems as if we're seeing the real Lara in *Legend* as opposed to the increasingly big-breasted, depthless character she was slowly becoming.

"Yeah, the biggest downfall of the previous games was that she never really evolved correctly in terms of both herself as a person and as a character, and in terms of her movement and capabilities," muses Hounson when we comment on Lara's more genuine look and feel. "We were thrilled that Toby decided to join Crystal and be a part of the team there and basically be this huge inspiration to the guys who wanted to make her look right, sound right and feel right within the game. We think that that was key to bringing the series back. Lara Croft is probably as big if not bigger

"IF SOMETHING LOOKS POSSIBLE IT USUALLY IS POSSIBLE. LARA LEAPS ABOUT THE ANCIENT RUINS WITH ALL THE AGILITY OF THE PRINCE OF PERSIA"

obvious choice for us," explains Hounson. "They had a fantastic back-history with the *Soul Reaver* series, which was critically acclaimed, so we knew that they had the necessary talent and technology there." For the team at Crystal Dynamics, the opportunity to reinvigorate *Tomb Raider* was an exciting one. "I don't think Crystal were intimidated at all, I think they grabbed it with both hands," smiles Hounson. "They knew the challenges ahead, but they really understood what was required of them in

LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMA



■ Story-wise, we're saving the details for release – but it involves lots and lots of shiny things.

IF LOOKS COULD KILL

Tomb Raider: Legend is set to debut on current-gen consoles, and looks phenomenally good. The Xbox 360 version, though, is another level of gorgeous altogether. "With the 360, we've had the benefit of very advanced technology to play around with," explains Hounson. "We actually have a separate tech team at Crystal dedicated to the 360 format. We wanted to bring all the fantastic new features of the Xbox 360 to *Tomb Raider*, so what we've done is we've taken the Core game engine and created our own 360-specific features." Sadly, though, the game will not take full advantage of the 360's online functions – after all, multiple Laras annihilating each other in a deathmatch situation hardly befits the game's realism and authentic feel.

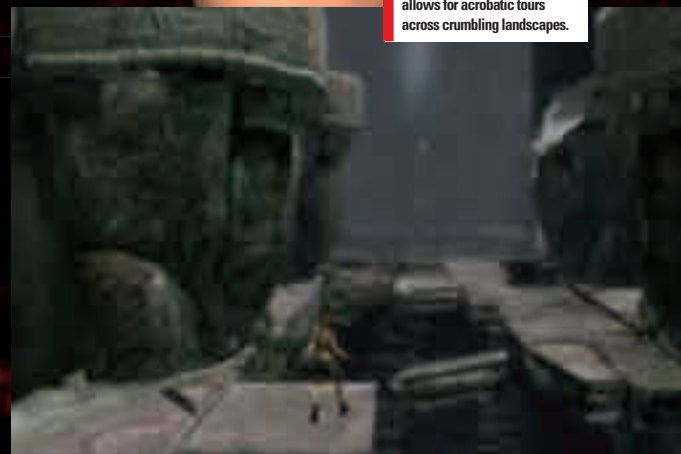
than any Hollywood actress, so first and foremost we needed to make sure that we looked after Lara."

Croft is indeed becoming a character with the depth to justify a return to the iconic status she enjoyed in the Nineties and still, to some extent, enjoys today. In what we saw of the game, we now have a very different Lara to the lacklustre character in *Angel Of Darkness*. But will all the work that's gone into the game be enough to win back disillusioned fans? "I think that people are going to love it," beams Hounson. "They're going to be so satisfied – fans and casual gamers alike. We're so happy with it. From the very first time we got builds from Crystal, we knew we were heading in the right direction."

However, there is still no set release date for the game on anything other than the PS2, for which an April release is planned. Hounson assures us that everyone involved in its development is keen to give it all the time it needs. "Everything's in now. The game's complete. It's done," he says, "but now we're putting in the refining touches, giving it that polish, because it deserves it. Lara deserves it. This is an important game for us, and an important game for the community too. In *Tomb Raider: Legend* we want gamers to feel an emotional connection with Lara; we want them to really get to know her at last." And with the game looking as undeniably promising as it does, **games™** is looking forward to getting to know her better.



■ The fluid movement system allows for acrobatic tours across crumbling landscapes.



SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL MOVIE GAME

WE REALLY WANT TO MARVEL

Format: PS2, Xbox, 360, GC, DS
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Z-Axis/Hypnos
Genre: Action
Players: TBA



PS2 After a flurry of *Marvel* character-based videogame hideousness, we can't help but hope that this title based around the upcoming third *X-Men* movie will redeem in some way. As it stands, it seems we will be put in control of three characters: Nightcrawler, Iceman and Wolverine. Players will then play through events that set the stage for the film and explain why Nightcrawler is mysteriously absent from the flick. History has taught us that the combination of comic book characters and film licences famously makes for poor games. Let's see if Activision can buck the trend. (And come up with a better name; *The Official Movie Game* is just a working title.)

RELEASE: MAY

SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE

ROLLING, ROLLING, ROLLING...

Format: PS2, PSP, GC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Traveller's Tales
Genre: Platform/Party
Players: 1-4



PS2 You can never actually have enough monkeys. It's a definite fact. Sega has been aware of this for a long while now and so ensures our happiness by continuing to provide us with chimps in balls through the highly successful games in the *Monkey Ball* franchise. This title, on the other hand, is looking a little bit different. Rather than the classic puzzle games that we've all grown accustomed to by now, *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* will be offering a platform-based style of play introducing us to a whole host of fresh characters and abilities to roll around with, not to mention a new trading card game. We can't wait to start collecting those bananas.

RELEASE: Q3 '06

LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCK

Format: PS2, Xb, GC, PC, PSP, DS, GBA
Origin: UK
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Traveller's Tales
Genre: Platform
Players: 1-2



PS2 We had very little to do with the huge success of the first *Lego Star Wars* title. Although hugely fun, the 'kiddy' nature made it feel more like an activity than a game. It was really fun, though, and if you're a fan of *Lego*, *Star Wars* or basic platform shenanigans then this second instalment is likely to appeal as much as the first. Based around the first/last three films, you'll have access to a larger number of creatures and vehicles and, as a bonus for playing the first title, an existing save will unlock up to 56 characters in Free Play mode. It'll certainly be interesting to see what Traveller's Tales learned from its last *Lego* outing.

RELEASE: Q3 '06

BLEACH DS: SOUTEN NI KAKERU UNMEI

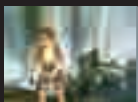
FIGHT FOR YOUR WHITE

Format: DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Treasure
Genre: Beat-'Em-Up
Players: 1-4



DS The very thought of a fighting game on the Nintendo DS is a wee bit peculiar and so we're going to have to wait before we pass judgement. The reason? *Bleach DS* is looking much like Treasure's Saturn classic *Guardian Heroes*, and with Treasure also being responsible for designing the likes of *Radiant Silvergun* it's a studio that certainly knows what it's doing. Obviously wanting to expand on the common fighting game formula as well as weapon-based combat, *Bleach DS Souten Ni Kakeru Unmei* will feature card game elements to enhance the battles and provide another level of strategy. It's going to be tough, but if anyone can make it work, it's Treasure. Here's hoping.

RELEASE: TBA



DELAYED – Tomb Raider: Legends [Multi]

The lovely lady Lara has slipped back a little, till April. It's okay, we can probably wait that long. And no, we won't make any gags about women taking ages to get ready – that would be weak.



DELAYED – Saint's Row [Xbox 360]


Exactly when THQ will manage to get *Saint's Row* onto the shelves is uncertain, but they're certainly taking their sweet time about it. Apparently, it could be September now. Thanks.

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION REMIX

MIXING IT UP

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: In-House
Genre: Racing
Players: TBA



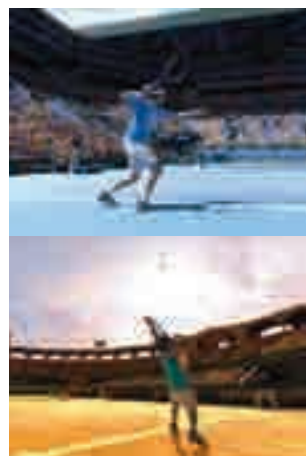
 Rockstar's wildly successful *Midnight Club 3* receives an update this month, featuring all of the original game's content, plus an entire new city, Tokyo. The Japanese capital has been captured in all the detail that graced the cityscapes of the other games (Chicago, San Diego and Atlanta), so expect to see all the traffic, pedestrians and shortcuts associated with racing with the *Midnight Club*. *Remix* is to be released at a budget price point, so fans of the original should not have too many complaints about paying out for the added content, and it's possible the series will now attract new fans. Whether it can live up to the street racing might of *Burnout*, however, is another matter entirely.


RELEASE: APRIL

VIRTUA TENNIS 3

ANYONE FOR IT?

Format: Arcade
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2



 There's not really very much we can say about *Virtua Tennis 3*, as everyone pretty much knows the score by this stage in proceedings. Aside from the, frankly, breathtaking visuals which have already been showcased at various industry events recently, everything here is as you would expect, including all the top notch players and different courts that normally feature in a tennis game. What is interesting with *Virtua Tennis 3*, however, is the ranking system that Sega has implemented. In an effort to keep people playing, your ranking can be remembered using IC Smart Card technology and therefore your position will slip if you stay away for too long. We'll see you down the arcade, then.


RELEASE: TBA

AND 1 STREETBALL

GOOD, WE LIKE COMMENTARY

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Black Ops
Genre: Sports
Players: TBA



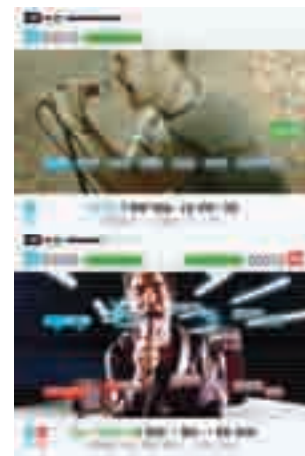
 Okay, so we've done our fair share of laughing at the influx of 'contemporary' and 'street' sports titles in the recent past, but *AND 1 Streetball* might not actually turn out to be all that bad. True, it may be based on a sport that few of us have heard of, but we've been informed that it's something a bit like basketball, albeit with a little more of an emphasis on style. With the *AND 1* clothing label ready and willing to back up the action, you can go ahead and bet your bottom dollar that *AND 1 Streetball* will be packed full of dressing up and pimping your players, but that doesn't mean to say that this won't turn out to be a damned fine sports game. We'll just see about that, shall we?


RELEASE: Q2 '06

SINGSTAR: ROCKS!

SING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

Format: PS2
Origin: US
Publisher: Sony
Developer: In-House
Genre: Party
Players: 1-2



 The *SingStar* series has managed to sell a phenomenal 3.6 million copies to date in this territory, and that's quite a feat as all the game really requires you to do is hum in tune. Of course, that on its own is no fun. It's far more embarrassing to get up and sing songs that only your little sister knows, in front of people you expect to respect you for managing a perfect score. Sigh. Though thanks to *SingStar: Rocks!*, the experience may not be quite as shameful in the near future. This version of the popular tune-fest features the somewhat more credible artistic talents of such bands as Bloc Party and The Bravery who have already been signed up for you to warble along to. Hurrah.

RELEASE: Q2 '06





Pink and green should never be seen. Except in this case. **Starquake, C64 [Bubble Bus] 1984**

MIXED REACTION AND ACCUSATION IS WHAT NINTENDO IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY USED TO FROM THE WESTERN WORLD, BUT THIS IS NOT HOW THE FUTURE LOOKS. NOW – WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT – IT SEEMS WE TRULY ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION...

The Liter



Touch



Putting a console into retirement is simply a step necessary to aid

and achieve progression. Although missed, tired machines tend to be laid to rest at a time when demand is faltering and the ability to compete is seen as an unfortunate 'unlikely' to those whose role it is to make these types of decisions – in short, a console will cease when the time is right. It's

a trend that's rarely bucked in this industry, largely due to a western public that's known to refuse to re-spend on unnecessary hardware. But there has been one true exception: and that's Nintendo.

Nintendo's DS Lite is now available throughout Japan, and the US and Europe will undoubtedly follow soon – offering a second way to enjoy DS titles and a not-really-needed fifth

means of playing the GBA games that have amassed over the years. There are no all-new titles exclusive to the machine, no boost in technical ability, and seemingly no solid advantage to owning one at all. The difference is purely cosmetic – something that's bound to enrage many.

133mm wide, 73.9mm high and 21.5mm deep are but a few of the stats that we've been gifted with over

the last few months, but '42 per cent smaller' really means very little until you have the item in the palm of your hand – where it now fits comfortably – and it's being placed next to the 'old' DS model. It's fair to say that it's pretty. Whether it's pretty enough to warrant enriching your local game store with the best part of £100 to own one when your existing DS is still relatively dust-free is debatable, but its new



■ The DS Lite will feature four different levels of brightness. Perfect for preserving battery life.

Just Browsing

One of the treats that's on the way for DS and Lite users alike is the Opera browser. This browser has already been seen on PC and mobile platforms, but it's now been announced that you'll soon be surfing the web on your DS. Unfortunately, unlike the PSP browser that came free of charge with an update, Opera will be available to buy in cartridge form much like any other DS title. Exactly what this will mean for the direction of the DS and what will be available in the way of downloads is unknown, but it's been confirmed that the stylus and dual screen layout will both be supported and you'll be able to access the net from any wireless network.

sleek design is sure to please and will definitely attract less attention on the bus – even when chanting the word 'Woofy', 'Floppy' or, indeed, 'Rover' repeatedly into the mic.

Leo Tan of BHPR – a company currently doing the PR for several Japan-developed DS titles here in the UK – agrees fully. "It's smaller, brighter, does not in any way force you to buy it, and does nothing that makes the original DS outdated," he insists. "What else is there to say? I might not be able to justify buying one, but it hardly matters. There are lots of things

I can't afford." He makes a good point. Though the original DS is due to be phased out over the next four months, the Lite could quite easily be seen as a luxury – but whether many will share this view is another question. "I don't cry over my lack of a 100-inch HD screen," Tan continues. "And I won't cry over my perceived 'betrayal' in this instance; after all, I can still play DS games on my current machine. The DS Lite is entirely optional for whoever would like one. Brilliant. Let's have more of this, let's have more people playing and let's have more games."

It's true, there's no doubt as to the new machine's worth. An aesthetic handheld is essential to popularity in today's harsher playground, and the cry of 'geek' is less frequently heard when the item provoking the attack is actually slim, sexy and – for all intents and purposes – actually appealing. But can Nintendo really justify a launch such as the DS Lite so soon?

Daylite Robbery?

The short answer is yes – and before any debate or any facts begin to be thrown around, a peek at the Japanese

launch is needed. On 2 March, the day the DS Lite was launched in Japan, larger stores had approximately 300 people queuing to get their hands on the redesigned DS; smaller shops had roughly 100. Considering the vast majority of these people probably already owned a DS, that's scary. Considering that there was little promotion, and the launch was only announced on Nintendo's Japanese website, makes it even scarier.

Japan is simply DS mad. "The Japanese games market was waiting for someone to come along, shake

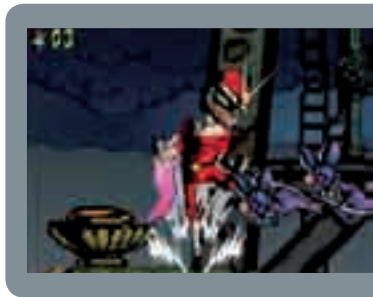
■ A dust cover for the GBA cartridge slot means no unsightly gaps in the sleek new design.

Here And Now

There may not be a huge range of DS titles on offer at the moment here in Europe, but there is certainly a mass of quality lurking on those shelves that you really can't afford to miss out on. Buy them now...

VIEWTIFUL JOE: DOUBLE TROUBLE

The *Viewtiful Joe* games have impressed nearly every step of the way, but a DS offering may have been pushing it a bit. As it goes, this is a great effort by Capcom and somehow all the style, gameplay and innovation you'd expect makes it in. A truly viewtiful title.



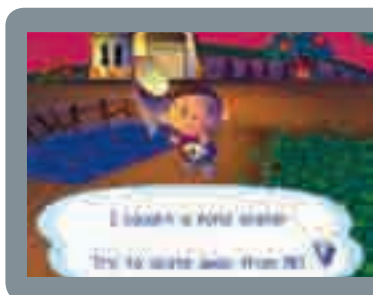
METEOS

One of the first titles to be available for the Nintendo DS in this territory and still one of the best. A simple puzzle game that sees you 'flicking' blocks with the stylus and forming groups of colours, *Meteos* is as addictive and as enjoyable as you'd expect a block puzzle game to be.



ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD

Although very similar to the GameCube offering, *Animal Crossing: Wild World* manages to hold its own by offering a huge amount of Wi-Fi fun and a world of gleeful characters that you can call your own. There may be little in the way of challenge, but that won't stop you putting in plenty of hours with this.



things up, and try and grow the market beyond its cycle of decline – we managed to achieve that.” Rob Lowe, Nintendo's UK product manager attempts to explain: “In Europe the games industry is still growing, and has been for many years, yet still within that climate the DS has been a massive success. User expansion, as we call it, is a principle that can be applied to any market – European, Japanese or American – it's just the mechanics and the means to get the message across that need to be tweaked slightly.”

This may be the case, but the UK has a way to go before the level of excitement seen in Japan is emulated. Our last visit brought about a meeting with a lady who had three DSs – baby pink, powder blue and regular silver – on her person at the same time. When we say ‘on her person’ we mean wearing them. As you would a hat or belt. We're talking about a machine that's as much of an accessory as it is a games console – Nintendo would be foolish not to milk it a little.

It turns out that Nintendo isn't foolish, and milking is something of a

pastime. It's common knowledge that the company is very good at making money from things that already exist in one form or another (in fact, the time between the DS and DS Lite launches is almost exactly the same as that between the original GBA and the far-nicer-looking GBA SP), but although a DS with Pikachu's face emblazoned across it may sell for a tidy sum over in Japan – Europe and the US aren't as easily swayed.

“Although, of course, we acknowledge that there's a small group of hardcore fans who will buy

every Nintendo product made – and we do thank them for their passion,” Lowe tells us. “In reality, we foresee current owners of DS perhaps passing their original DSs onto parents, sisters, brothers, girlfriends or boyfriends, and then purchasing the DS Lite, allowing them to play multi-player with their friends and family, and also get the latest version of the console.”

It's a wily tactic. A small cosmetic update, and a decent number of the 13 million worldwide who snapped up the original DS hand over their dated handheld to another generation of

Lite Viewing

Maybe it's a sign of Nintendo attempting to keep up with the many functions of the PSP, but there have been a number of other announcements that point toward your DS Lite being used for far more than games. Nintendo has announced that it will release a range of interactive travel phrasebooks for the machine as well as a digital TV receiver in the near future. However, the TV receiver is only due for launch in Japan at the moment and, although importing one will be possible, there'd be little point as it will only pick up Japanese channels. In time, though, who knows...

■ The button layout has seen a few improvements and the mic is now in a more central location.

■ Little is known for sure, but there will certainly be a few surprises come the Revolution.

gamer – a generation who then also set about gaming with Nintendo. And, as we know, with Nintendo's focus on party games, accessibility and 'fun for all the family' there are few generations, younger or older, which are going to struggle to find their place in Nintendo's plan.

iLite

Although the overall plan is clear – the appeal of Nintendo products to all persons of all ages – it's the intricacies of the plot that are currently in question. The DS Lite is Nintendo's

first move toward the Revolution, and the rumour mill charged with handling how the two machines will work together has been fired up in a big way. Some are betting on a diary-like compatibility, while others are reckoning on the DS being used to play older Nintendo titles – but the official line from all at Nintendo is still of the much-hated 'unfortunately we cannot comment on any potential DS/Revolution connectivity at this stage,' kind, and no amount of pressing is likely to budge any further information until this year's GDC and E3 are out

of the way. However, that said, the company's plans for hardware are becoming ever clearer.

Releasing hardware that's merely slimmer and lighter rather than of any noticeable technical superiority, isn't a new trick. It's a tactic that Apple does exceptionally well, and Nintendo is quickly being tarred with the same brush – not that it's a bad thing, according to Nintendo. "It's flattering to be compared to such well-designed and iconic products," Rob Saunders, UK PR for Nintendo informs us. "But what's important with the design of

DS Lite is that it appeals to a broader audience than more traditional looking 'games machines'. Appearance-wise, it looks more of a lifestyle product – when fully closed, if you didn't know it was a DS, you'd struggle to guess what it was at all – the design is so sleek and sophisticated."

It's a topic that Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo's vice president of US sales and marketing, has also commented on recently; comparing the DS Lite situation directly with the one in the portable music device space, where it shows clearly that technological

There And Now

Sometimes, our territory really suffers. Although available, you're either going to have to import, or front the cash for a trip to Japan if you want to get your hands on some of the best the DS has to offer...

DAI GASSO! BAND BROTHERS

Getting a decent music game on the Nintendo DS has to be a difficult task, but *Dai Gasso! Band Brothers* manages it near perfectly. Hit and hold buttons to play a host of well-known themes and plenty of catchy J-Pop. Trust us, it sounds a lot easier than it actually is.



JUMP SUPERSTARS

For those who loved the *Smash Brothers* games, this is a must. Featuring characters from Bobobobo Bobobo, Death Note, and some from the better-known *Dragonball* and *One Piece* cartoons! *Jump Superstars* pushes the machine's abilities with simultaneous four-player combat, and emerges triumphant.



OSSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN!

Cheerleading has never been so fun - especially when the cheerleaders in question are mainly men. As this is from the same team responsible for the superb *Gitaroo Man*, it should come as no surprise that *Ouendan!* takes the rhythm action genre, shakes it up, and shows exactly how well a stylus can actually be implemented.



■ Although not available at launch, the Navy Blue and Ice versions will soon be made ready for you to buy.

advancement is moving at a greater speed than consumers are willing to pay for. The result? Cheaper, smarter redesigns - as frequently seen in the dominant iPod range - are in huge demand and are dominating the market. Relative to Nintendo, it's easy to see where he's going. It's always been known that Nintendo isn't planning to win over the masses with dazzling graphical bounds, and the low-spec - with an equally low price tag - route is the one that's been opted for. Whether this approach is successful or not is going to rely

largely on the software titles that become available for the machines.

Although little is known of the Revolution's planned releases, the DS is currently enjoying great success in Europe. "We have sold more than two million copies of *Nintendogs* in Europe - more than in Japan and more than in the US," Saunders tells us. "To be honest, the diversity and breadth of range in the DS software portfolio is one of its great strengths and is also why it appeals to so many different people across so many different lifestyles and demographics. We're

offering new ways to play and they're interesting, unique, easy to get to grips with and above all, fun."

This 'fun' is another area that has caused debate. Although the DS has many a reputable title to its name, it's back in Japan where most of the goodies are showered. Perhaps it's seen as some kind of reward for their undying loyalty, but some of the best titles - such as *Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan* - aren't planned for release on these shores. The result of some of the 'tweaking' that Lowe spoke of earlier, perhaps?

Any remaining questions will be answered in a few short months, but for now it's the DS Lite that's showing us the way. It's design and functions closely mirror those seen in products present in areas outside the console market, and it's leading the way to something that's far different from what either Microsoft or Sony are planning on offering - exactly what Nintendo has aimed for from the start. It may not be the step that many consumers wanted to see, but it's certainly not going to do Nintendo any harm.





The Players

A MAN THAT NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION, SID MEIER IS ONE OF THE INDUSTRY'S MOST RESPECTED NAMES IN DEVELOPMENT. 25 YEARS' WORTH OF EXPERIENCE IS HARD TO COME BY NOWADAYS. FORTUNATELY, MEIER IS KEEN TO SHARE...

SID MEIER

FIRAXIS GAMES

Some would say that the videogames industry is fairly predictable. You find yourself dutifully waiting for the 'next big thing' while still attempting to eke every drop of creativity from your soon-to-be-obsolete machine – same old, same old. Only, that's not the case is it? Not only are titles such as the upcoming *Civilization IV* showing us that the past is far from dead, but also retro gaming has never been more popular. Few are more aware of this revelation than legend Sid Meier, director of creative development at Firaxis Games. "It's great there has been talk of a History of Games Museum, as there are so many games that you just can't play any more," he begins excitedly. "I mean, you can watch a movie that was released ten years ago or a book from 500 years ago. Why shouldn't it be the same with games?"

It's strange, despite the fact that Meier has successfully dragged (sans kicking and screaming) some of his early titles such as *Pirates* and *Civilization* into the current generation, it's hard to imagine him playing anything other than games displaying eight colours. That's what you get for being so fondly remembered as a retro legend, we guess. "Well, I got *Guitar Hero* the other day," Meier tells us with a grin. "Yeah, we walked in and they only had one left. I guess it was our lucky day. Me and my son have been playing non-stop for the last week." It's almost as if he's aware how difficult it was for us to get our hands on a copy, and was gloating. "I'm very impressed by it," he continues, "it doesn't get much wrong. I like the songs and it's got a very good difficulty curve, so anyone can play."

It's interesting to hear his opinions of today's difficulty levels. When Meier started out on the Atari 800 all those years ago, games were nigh on impossible to complete, whereas now party games and titles that task you with pampering animals rather than conquering bosses seem to be what's on offer. We still remember the rage of being quashed by the likes of *Jet Set Willy* and *Sabre Wulf* continuously throughout 1984.

"Sorry, developers just didn't do as much testing then," he insists, failing to heal the wounds. "One of the things we've learned from consoles is that games should be easy

to play. You shouldn't have to read the manual to play the first level. A few years ago, we were targeting the hardcore players – that's what most of us are, really, but that's not the case any more. There's now a reason to be more accessible. That's what Nintendo does so well."

This is where we were aiming the conversation anyway; someone with such history in the industry must surely have an opinion on what the future holds for us, and Nintendo's efforts are fair fodder. Touching screens, waving controllers at the screen... "Well, it's new," Meier admits. "Not competing on technical specs, and saying that they're going to create 'magic' is very interesting. Providing for the younger and more average person is what the company is all about." We can't help it: "What about the Revolution controller, Sid?" we cry. "Oh, the controller. Well, we'll have to wait and see whether that's a step forward, back or sideways. It's a possible success, but I do think it's a risk."

It's obvious that he's not going to speculate about Nintendo any further, but Sony and Microsoft have far more 'real' machines to pass comment on. The unavailability of the Xbox 360 as well as the quality of some titles has caused concern, and many are wondering whether it's just too early. "It's not that the Xbox or PS2 have run out of ideas or are behind the times," Meier assures us, "it's just time to start the new cycle. It won't be great straight away; we're still learning. But over the next few years we'll see what the new machines can really do, and I doubt anyone will be unimpressed. It's just up to us to catch up with the technology."

If anyone knows about this, it's Meier; he's seen many a generation change and has embraced each one. "I remember when the CD-ROM first came out," he tells us. "We were like 'whoa, 700 megabytes, we're never going to be able to fill that up. We're not going to be able to be creative any more because all our time will be spent filling that thing'. A balance is always found eventually and you start to see what's achievable. That's what we have to look forward to..."




Civilization IV is out now on PC and was reviewed in issue 38.

**"IT'S AMAZING HOW
PEOPLE REMEMBER GAMES
FROM 15 TO 20 YEARS AGO,
AND HOW LOYAL PEOPLE ARE
- THERE ARE JUST SO MANY
GREAT MEMORIES THERE"**

SID MEIER

BACK TO BASICS

investing copious amounts of time in videogames is a noble hobby, but with deaths and controversy snapping at the industry's heels, could the decline of hardcore titles be just around the corner?



Cans of Red Bull are carelessly strewn across the filthy, dusty carpet. Daylight has melted away into night and the light is dim. The only radiance shining upon the anxious gamer's face comes from the television screen displaying fast-moving images. The screeching of brakes and the revving of an engine are the only sounds heard as the young lad sets off on another mission. The slightly audible sighs coming from his dry mouth are all that can be heard amid the din and the rumbling of his empty stomach.

This is the stereotypical view of a gamer, hard at play, immersed in his own world for hours and hours, days and days, weeks and weeks. His only respite comes from the odd cold pizza or injection of caffeine. The rest of the real world looks on, anxious not to fall prey of this time-consuming drug that just wasn't apparent in the bygone days of *Pong*.

According to newspapers, playing games is 'just not healthy'. When a boy spent a whole day kneeling down while playing a computer game, he was rushed to hospital with a blood clot in his leg. When researchers studied the game-playing habits of children, they found that those who played for long periods of time were more likely to be hyperactive. And when a South Korean man played the online game *StarCraft* for 50 hours with only a few breaks, he keeled over and died.

Across the world, people are forgetting to eat, drink, sleep and play, and it's all because videogames are, apparently, consuming people's lives. Those who claim to know best say games should be played in small doses, if at all, and that it doesn't help that games are becoming longer and longer, stretched out by cut-scenes, subsidiary tasks and high difficulty levels. ➤

neverending stories

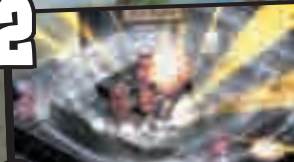
1



PHANTASY STAR ONLINE

With players clocking up in excess of a thousand hours, this hack-and-slash RPG is one huge game. Released in 2000, it was an online title for the Dreamcast, later ported to the PC, GameCube and Xbox. By drawing the player into an intriguing plot and asking them to explore a large, virtual world, gamers have happily lost countless nights' sleep.

2



DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS

This great PS2 tactical RPG is theoretically infinite and potentially takes up many hundreds of hours of time – some have reportedly played for over 1,500 hours. Drawing heavily from Japanese animation, the game follows the adventures of demon Prince Laharl, and unlocking the many possibilities will have you reaching for the matchsticks.

3



THE SIMS

This series of games, created by Will Wright, has sold millions of copies in its various guises since being released in February 2000 and is one of the best-selling PC games ever. By controlling the lives of your virtual people, the possibilities are endless and this game could last you forever as you build up your families and sort out any strife.

4



TETRIS

Although it's hardly deep and meaningful, this Russian puzzler was a massive hit on the Game Boy and was so addictive that days could pass you by and you'd hardly notice. Trying to rack up a huge score meant sorting out the falling bricks into neat rows – once you'd played it for an hour, it became less easy to waste your hard work by turning it off.

5



CAPTIVE

This dungeon-based game released on the Amiga in 1990 was a long one, primarily because the programmer used a clever map seeding algorithm which meant there were around 128,000 levels. David Amor, creative director of Relentless, said, "Often we'd have someone call in at Level 20 and ask if they were near the end. It was heartbreaking to tell them that they had another 127,980 levels ahead of them".

> Size matters

It's certainly true that videogames are greater in length today than they were 20 years ago. But does the fact that they're becoming longer and more involving really mean that games are taking over our minds and lives? Or have we, instead, reached a wonderful stage in game development where titles offer a deeper, more thought-provoking environment than ever before?

The media does not frown half as much on people who passively watch television for 15 hours each week as it does those who devote the same amount of time actively playing games. And while television has become increasingly dumbed down, gaming has been advancing at a fast rate, offering storylines that equal – if not surpass – those of television scriptwriters while offering bundles of interactivity.

So what should the games industry do? Should it continue to offer time-consuming titles or should it, instead, hark back to the time when games could be completed in an afternoon? Ironically, it's the industry itself that is asking these questions. Much of this debate has less to do with health risks and more to do with encouraging new people to pick up a console and immerse themselves in a new, pixelated universe. The problem is that long games

are thought to deter some people from this very rewarding and fun hobby.

Step forward Nintendo's new Revolution console, due out later this year. It's set to cause a stir and go some way to addressing the issue of game length, not least following comments made by Nintendo president Satoru Iwata. He has said that the time people had to play videogames would always be limited and, because some games take a long time to complete, they could be off-putting to those whose time is so much in demand that they barely have any spare capacity to read a paper, let alone have a go at playing *Paperboy*.

The Revolution will simplify gaming, he says. The new controller will host just a D-pad and two buttons, labelled A and B. A flick of the wrist will determine what happens on screen. It will be no more taxing and difficult to use than a television remote control – which is why it closely resembles one. The games will be attractive to as wide an audience as possible, for there is a fear that the take up of games by people not already playing will dwindle over the next couple of years. Nintendo is already making a fresh attempt at encouraging girl gamers with its pink Gameboy Micro, and the Revolution will try to prick the interest of entire families. To do so would mean creating more instant-

appeal games which don't take weeks to complete and can be put down as easily as they are picked up.

Dip in and out

But is it a backward step? David Millard, senior designer for Kuju Entertainment, maker of *Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior* suggests, "It's up to the audience to choose the type of experience they want. I don't think it's fair to say that people leading busy lives wouldn't invest a large chunk of it reading the entire *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, even if they do it on the train. It's the format of these experiences which is key. You pick up a book, read a bit, mark your page and come back later. Not enough games are like this. A really long game, with very few thought-out save points might have seemed like genius pacing to its designer, but it provides an obstructive experience for the short attention span of most 'mainstream' gamers. What people want is the ability to dip into something whenever they like, under their control. If a massively long game is matched to a constant saving/freezing system and a good 'here's what you were doing' helper, then anyone can enjoy a big game."

Games began as arguably shallow entertainment. Two bats and a ball constituted *Pong*, for instance,

A QUESTION OF LENGTH: PAC-MAN 1980 VS PAC-MAN 2005

It began as a simple affair. Players controlled Pac-Man through a maze, gobbling up pellets and avoiding the pursuing ghosts. Nevertheless, since its debut in 1980, *Pac-Man* has been played in excess of 10 billion times, according to Namco.

Although there have been many updates of the original classic, the latest—*Pac-Man World 3*—sees our hero in a land quite unlike that of 25 years ago and it would astound people who remember the simple, short, easy-to-play gameplay of the original, revived relatively recently on one of those popular plug-and-play joysticks. One difference is that Pac-Man has a voice!

The 'wocka wocka' of the original has been extended to a full vocabulary with a voice provided by Martin T. Sherman, whose previous acting work includes *Gangs Of New York*, *Band Of Brothers*, and *Batman Begins*. More importantly, there is also an

issue of length, demonstrating that games today are certainly more complex and longer than ever before.

Andrew Oliver of Blitz Games, which developed *Pac-Man World 3*, says, "This game is around the longest we have ever made and it would probably take in excess of ten hours to complete." He admits, "It's not particularly difficult, it just takes experimentation and searching. Perseverance will get you to the end, but we try to ensure that we keep it mildly and increasingly challenging throughout the game, and open up new worlds, enemies and puzzles to keep it interesting all the while. We believe that people do want to complete games, and a game that is too difficult to beat, just holds bad memories for those who eventually give up. We want people to have fond memories of our games and feel a sense of achievement that they beat it and saw the eventual outcome".



a game which had about as much depth as a puddle but was nonetheless entertaining. The majority of games during the Seventies and Eighties were similarly lacking in sophistication, with most people able to complete the majority of titles within only a few hours. Of course, there are many exceptions to this, one of which was the classic game *Elite* which pitched the player in a hostile galaxy with a Cobra MKIII spacecraft and 100 credits to their name and asked them to survive this three-dimensional universe against aliens, bounty hunters, pirates, police and traders. But the time spent on the games of old was still far less than the energy expended on today's console and PC offerings.

"In the early years of videogames, games had to be good, solid and fun to play, mostly because of the technology," says Nolan Bushnell, inventor of *Pong* and founder of Atari. "We were the first to develop videogames, so we had to make them simple, easy and quickly

understood." Since those old-school days, games have been progressing at a rate of knots. Now, games are undeniably more complex; they tax the mind, display emotion, and require more than a quick jerk of a joystick and tap of a fire button. Their difficulty levels more than satisfy hardcore gamers in ways the likes of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* never could.

If someone who had not played or seen a game since the days when Atari was king of the consoles and Nintendo was famous for its simple Game and Watch titles tried their hand at *Devil May Cry 3* or *Fahrenheit*, it would blow their minds as quickly as a particularly good *Quake* player would shoot an opponent."

Not everyone is convinced, though, as Bushnell says, "Keeping things simple is more difficult to do than building something complex, and although there are great long games today and the current market does a very good job at long form, they are not, in general, very social

games that allow people to communicate, interact and socialise."

> Scriptless enjoyment

Such thoughts are at the forefront of the minds of Nintendo's bosses. They are looking at creating videogames that will spark debate, that will stop whole families in their tracks to stare at the television in awe – the sort of instant-appeal game that they will all want to play.

But is that what the gamers want? *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is the hottest games franchise ever created with millions of games sold, and yet it offers a huge gameplaying area. Players roam square mile after square mile of the virtual city, getting mixed up in everything from gang warfare to stealing cars and having sex. According to *The Guardian*, a players' guide to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* contained 53,000 words. That's a lot of explanation. But aside from missions, players can roam the city for as long as they want – forever, should they so wish. If they somehow do get bored, they can seek out the various Easter eggs that are dotted around the place, but there's more than enough fun to be had exploring this pixellated real estate without that.

Indeed, sandbox modes are proving popular. The *Grand Theft Auto* concept is set to be expanded further when Microsoft releases *Crackdown* for the Xbox 360. For a start, there will be no story as such – certainly not in the cut-scene sense. You will just play a policeman battling a trio of gangs, and from that premise comes as much freedom as you like. The idea is that the player does what he or she wants when he or she wants to do it. Whether or not what you do succeeds is a different matter – the aim is to build up your character progressively as you try various things in the game. Each stage in your

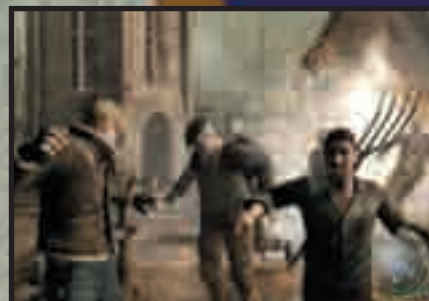
development opens up new possibilities. It points the way toward a very lengthy and involved game.

When you're paying the best part of £40 for a game, you want value. "There's a feeling in the industry that when you charge a high price for games, we must give value for money," says Andrew Oliver, one half of the Oliver Twins which founded the *Dizzy* series of games, and who now runs Blitz Games with his brother Phillip. "The budget of developing games is now into the many millions, and developers will do their utmost to make the game engaging. Many people do have the time and want to spend many hours 'losing themselves' in these games." The *Dizzy* games were built on a large scale. The adventures, popular on the 8-bit and 16-bit computers, sprawled over dozens of screens, contained a large number of puzzles – some easy, many difficult – and contained enough variety to keep you going that bit further.

But Oliver says the games weren't as big as people remember them – certainly not when compared to titles out there today. "It's just that they'd take half an hour to load off a cassette tape before you could even start," he explains. "They'd take two to three hours to complete if you knew all the puzzles, but it would take time to work them out. Probably the thing that made them feel so much bigger was the fact there was no save game, and therefore if you died a few too many times it was right back to the start for you. That's pretty harsh, but people had incredible perseverance and patience and many would complete those games."

Viva La Revolution?

That the *Dizzy* games were hugely popular despite the lack of a save facility shows that people will invest energy in time-consuming games if those titles offer an absorbing challenge. Of course, today,



GAMES THAT KILL

Sometimes, people can be their own worst enemies. When a 28 year-old man played the multi-player online role-playing game, *StarCraft*, in the South Korean city of Taegu, he became so involved that he collapsed and later died in hospital. Police said he had eaten little during his 50-hour stint, which began on 3 August 2005. The only time he stopped, according to a Taegu provincial police official speaking to Reuters news agency, was when he went to the toilet and had short naps. The official said, "We presume the cause of death was heart failure stemming from exhaustion."

This is an extreme example of long games being detrimental to health. The majority of players fit gaming in with their other activities – such as eating and sleeping – but it's certainly

true that MMORPGs like *World Of Warcraft*, *Ultima* and *EverQuest* can be played for hours on end, with the social scene and large scope of the games said to be among the main factors that keep people online.

Experts suggest that too much playing is an addiction that needs to be recognised. There are tell-tale signs such as becoming withdrawn from society and playing to excess, but such addiction is not only confined to videogaming; people can be just as addicted to television, the gym or even reading. Psychologist Professor Mark Griffiths told the BBC News website, "It does seem to be the case that online gaming addiction, for a small minority, is a real phenomenon and people suffer the same symptoms as traditional addictions, but the good news is that it is a small minority".



▶ games can be saved which means long offerings can be chopped into sizeable chunks. The only thing that can really spoil the party is when games are made artificially lengthy because they try to get the player to do too much.

Some games, such as *Ultimate Spider-Man* slightly mar an otherwise free-roaming nature by engaging the player in subsidiary tasks in between the main missions. And a huge number of games rely heavily on story. In many cases, a game is not simply something that you play but something that you actually watch too. Full Motion Video (FMV) destroyed a lot of games back in the Nineties when the development craze was for interactive movies that required little input from the player. But today's ongoing fad is the cut-scene: a tool that bridges the gap between the actual play.

At one time, stories just consisted of a couple of throwaway lines on a cassette inlay, delivering up a tale of nonsense about some evil wizard wanting to take over the world and how you needed to stop him. All very *James Bond*. Now, these stories

are integral to the whole playing experience, with sections of game time being eaten up as you watch the next animated sequence. And some of them cannot be skipped.

Somehow, this still manages to enrich a game. You're not just mindlessly blowing stuff up; you're doing something for a reason. When you achieve the target you've been set, you're rewarded with a little film that sets the scene for what is about to follow and off you go, taking your experience that little bit further forward.

Stripping this element from longer games, would deny players an element of complexity which is as enriching as a good novel, as inspiring as a well-composed piece of music and as uplifting as a notable movie. The videogames industry wants to be seen as on a par with all these media and to do so will mean offering titles that can change people's outlook on life.

"Nowadays, games are so big and so complex, that we feel we have to give them all the qualities of movies, with interesting back stories, cinematic

cut-scenes, character motivation, worlds to explore, puzzles to solve, people and creatures to meet, challenge or kill," says Oliver. Hardcore gamers lap them up and even Nintendo, in its push for new markets, has stated emphatically that it will not turn its back on the people who want longer, more in-depth and more involved videogames.

Nintendo president Satoru Iwata delivering his keynote address in San Francisco at the Game Developers Conference on 10 March 2005 said: "If we were not interested in core gamers, the GameCube would not be home to the first big hit of 2005 here in America – Capcom's *Resident Evil 4*. It's a sign that not only do we care about core gamers, but core gamers care about Nintendo."

So will shorter, simpler games be the key to enticing a new audience? After all, we have EyeToy, dance mats, *SingStar* and *Buzz!* pulling in your more mainstream punter, and fewer and fewer are bothering to see any further than the first mildly challenging boss in some of the more hardcore titles. The jury, it seems, is out.



COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE HEAD FOR BOSTON TO ROCK OUT WITH HARMONIX...

WHEN IT COMES TO RHYTHM-ACTION TITLES, **HARMONIX HAS TO BE CONSIDERED THE FINEST DEVELOPMENT STUDIO IN THE WORLD.** SO IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT **WE SHOULD HEAD OUT TO BOSTON** FOR A VISIT AND ATTEMPT TO MAKE SWEET, SWEET MUSIC TOGETHER...

The streets of Boston are ridiculously busy. Not only that, but the bars are packed as well. There's probably a completely sound reason why all of the students are out on the town; but we don't actually know what it is. Surely it can't always be this busy? That would be petrifying... "Sure is," Daniel Sussman, producer at Harmonix agrees with a slight snigger. "The roving bands of students that wander the streets need to be treated like wild beasts. Generally, though, they're just as afraid of you as you are of them." We doubt this greatly somehow. Even armed as we are with our usually oh-so popular

HARMONIX

"ANYTHING WE MAY
OR MAY NOT BE
WORKING ON WOULD
THEORETICALLY BE
TOTALLY AWESOME"

DANIEL SUSSMAN, PRODUCER, HARMONIX



SURF'S UP

Music games have been Harmonix's bread and butter for over five years now, but *AntiGrav* was something a little different. An exclusive Apollo 440 soundtrack accompanied this reasonably successful attempt to make use of Sony's EyeToy peripheral, and it required you to wave around your limbs to guide a surfer type through a number of futuristic settings.

"Working on *AntiGrav* was fun because it was a different kind of project from the other music titles we'd done," Sussman tells us. "Though, while I'm up for anything, I'm very happy working in the music genre. Personally, I have high hopes for a whiffle ball game. But nobody appreciates my genius. Not yet..."



■ Pondering how to get more rock into a game. It's a hard life.

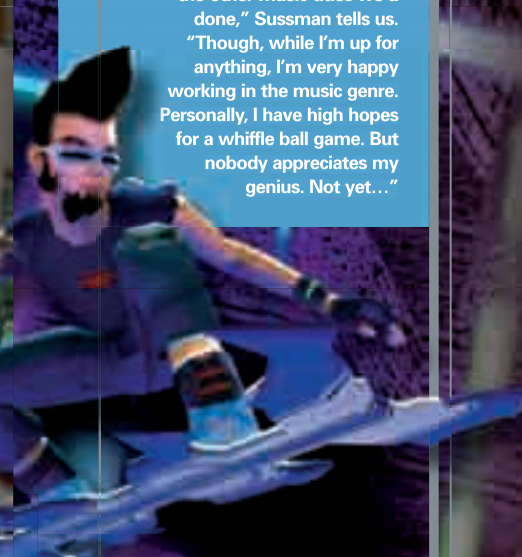
English accents we feel a little vulnerable. "Boston really is the best," he continues, "it's got a great music scene, there's tons of culture and it's one of the best sports cities in the world. Also, having so many schools located so close makes it really easy to get really talented interns." With these words Sussman's enthusiasm for the location is justified. Not only were we going to be able to sample some of the bands that Boston has to offer, but this favourable location and, more importantly, its interns are part of the reason we've been pushing our hand-eye co-ordination to the limit for the past three years with *Amplitude* and, more recently, *Guitar Hero*.

The last couple of months of our lives have involved ■ little else other than playing *Guitar Hero*. A sad fact, maybe, but *Guitar Freaks* gave us just a small taster of what a guitar peripheral could really do and it doesn't take much to lure us into playing *More Than A Feeling* that 'one more time' once again. "As a company, we've been lucky to have worked on games that are just incredibly fun," Sussman admits. "From the *Karaoke Revolution* series to the beat-matching experiences of *FreQuency* and *Guitar Hero*, to the straight-up innovation of *AntiGrav*, each game has been very

rewarding. Suffice to say, we have had our fair share of drunken karaoke experiences."

This revelation is hardly surprising. After spending ■ some time with the team responsible for these titles, it's obvious that we're looking at a group of people that works extremely well together. Rock attire seems to be the norm and, to be honest, it's unlike any studio we've witnessed before. "Being a part of the *Guitar Hero* team was amazing," Sussman tells us as we step down from our third *Amplitude* defeat. "We had such a close-knit group of people – all of whom totally understood what we were trying to do. Not that it was a stretch; we had a pretty rock group of people. I just had all these awesome moments where we'd be in a meeting trying to think about how to get more metal into the game. We'd just sit back and think 'can you believe we're actually getting paid to do this?'"

It's a fair comment. As weird as it seems to us, ■ rhythm action titles aren't nearly as popular as they should be; but we're willing to bet that when *Guitar Hero* is released in our territory in April, we'll be seeing a lot more casual interest in the genre. "That's because there's an aspect of escapism when you can create



THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC

A superb back catalogue of games that have as much of a following now as they did upon release – how many development studios can boast that?

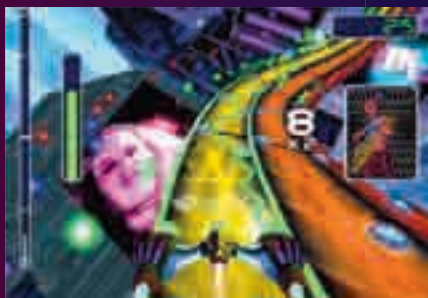
FREQUENCY [PS2, 2002]

■ This is where it all really began for the studio. The combination of popular music tracks and frantic button pressing was found to be both addictive and insanely popular. So much so, in fact, that the title has obtained cult status, and teams of people are still remixing tracks to showboat online.



AMPLITUDE [PS2, 2003]

■ After the roaring success of *Frequency*, a sequel was bound to be on the cards, and Harmonix delivered the goods with style. Honing the *Frequency* formula and with even more known talent, *Amplitude* was the perfect way for Harmonix to cement its reputation as a rhythm-action god.



KARAOKE REVOLUTION [PS2, 2005]

■ Sparing our fingers only resulted in our voices being put to the test when *Karaoke Revolution* arrived. Attempting to match your own dulcet tones to those displayed on the screen in this game was implemented in a far more satisfying way than the *SingStar* offerings of late have managed.



"I HAVE HIGH HOPES FOR A WHIFFLE BALL GAME, BUT NOBODY APPRECIATES MY GENIUS. NOT YET..."

DANIEL SUSSMAN,
PRODUCER, HARMONIX



■ Messy work stations are the norm in the Harmonix office.

– or recreate – music, without having any real musical ability," Sussman agrees. "In fact, one of the founding principles of Harmonix as a company, is that we want to bring that magical feeling of creating music to people who have never experienced it before."

It's a kindly reason to exist and it's hard not to go a little mushy inside when he speaks of it but, when it does come to appeal, a key element of any music game has to be the tracks selected to feature within the title and we've seen a few different approaches from the team. While some games have enjoyed exclusive soundtracks tailored to fit by respected artists, unknown local talent and competition winners have supplemented others. "Each game is different when it comes to music selection," Sussman explains. "Obviously, we try to go for music that we like, although it's important to take gameplay into consideration. On *Guitar Hero*, we had a list of hundreds of songs from which we culled the most playable and widest-ranging choices. We aimed for a broad range in terms of both style and difficulty."



■ We find it hard to concentrate on games when there's a penguin lamp just in front of us.

01

02

NAME THAT TUNE

1 DANIEL SUSSMAN
IN A NUTSHELL: Producer on some of Harmonix's finest such as *Karaoke Revolution*, *AntiGrav* and, more recently, our beloved *Guitar Hero*.

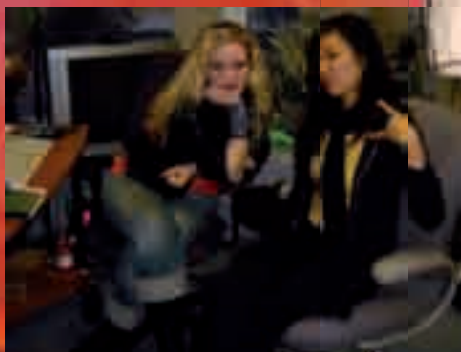
2 HELEN MCWILLIAMS
IN A NUTSHELL: Does PR for Harmonix, and is fond of dancing. Has a range of shapes so mad they made us weep with inadequacy.

On this point, we've lost far more games than we've won, and after being met at the beginning of the day by the phrase, "You're not the best at *Amplitude*, we are," we're now starting to believe it's probably a true enough fact. It's with actual fear that we decide to challenge whatever his favourite song may be... "The Acro-brats song *Callout* is by far the best in *Guitar Hero*," Sussman tells us with a grin. "I feel that the guitar work of this Daniel Sussman fellow is simply unparalleled. Um, I'm also a huge fan of the Upper Crust's *Eureka*, *I Found Love* – those guys rock."

We hadn't previously realised that Sussman himself is a member of one of the bands used in the game. It shouldn't really come as a surprise, it's clear that most people in the building have some form of musical background – working in this kind of environment, we guess you can't afford not to... "Yeah, there's loads of in-house talent," he confirms. "Some of the *Guitar Hero* bands that feature team members are Freezepop, The Acro-brats, Artillery, Made In Mexico, Shaimus, Honest Bob And The Factory To Dealer Incentives, Anarchy Club... and they're just the ones that play out. There are tons more people who play instruments or sing; everything from classical clarinet to hip hop to Gamelan orchestra to heavy metal guitar. The company is

comprised mostly of musicians of some form."

This fact explains a lot, and with the next generation of machines now at our doorstep, the possibilities for such a talented team hold few limitations. "Well, I can't really say what's coming next." He comments in the same way as they all do, "all I can tell you is, anything we may or may not be working on would theoretically be totally awesome." This is something we don't doubt, and hopefully, if *Guitar Hero* does as well here in the UK as it has in the US, we'll be seeing the idea expanded in the near future.



FEATURE

DEVELOP IT YOUR

YOURSELF

MILLION-DOLLAR BUDGETS. SCRIPTS WRITTEN BY HOLLYWOOD PROS. EXPENSIVE HARDWARE DEMANDS. CELEBRITY VOICE ACTORS. SECURING THE APPROVAL OF MICROSOFT, SONY AND NINTENDO. THESE ARE JUST FIVE OF THE OBSTACLES NORMAL GAMES FACE ON THEIR PATH TO STORE SHELVES. CAN'T WE JUST MAKE OUR OWN TITLES AND SAVE ALL THE HASSLE? GAMES™ INVESTIGATES GAMES... THAT LET YOU MAKE OTHER GAMES



W

hile some may champion games as art with an almost puritanical defence of the interactive medium's creative element, there's one thing that separates them from books, music and other forms of art: barrier to entry. You could pick up a pen and start writing a book, buy a guitar and compose some songs, paint a picture with an art kit – but where will you get the thousands of pounds to hire artists and coders to create your own game? And no, it's not like the low-budget movies you can make with a home camcorder using friends and relatives as cast members. Development teams need real talent at a programming and design level to make a modern game. Or so the thinking goes. Is it possible that lowly gamers like us could turn our own ideas into reality? There is an answer and – get this – most of them run on your average home computer.

To some it will come as no surprise (see: Haven't I Seen This Before? boxout), but to a new generation of budding Miyamotos, Minters and Molyneuxs, the notion of software that lets beginners create games is revelatory. At the moment, there are a number of tools that let you skip having to score a degree in a programming language like C/C++ to get straight down to designing levels and working out what happens in your game. And they hail from all over, with the prime candidates being Japanese series RPG Maker, French company Clickteam, Brazilian software Game Editor, and the UK-based Game Creators.

WHAT'S YOUR DREAM?

For those tickled by the chance to turn their ideas into actuality, the creativity rush provided by the four titles just mentioned can prove hugely potent, turning backseat designers into underground heroes. They all share the same aim: help gamers with little to no knowledge of programming create their own games. And these are programs designed for everyone, from the Joe Schmoe who wouldn't know what BASIC was through to those who pore over shots of the latest games but never know how to have a go at it themselves. They are more accessible than level editors or the SDKs (Software Development Kits) produced to work with certain FPSs. "The possibility to actually flesh out my thoughts into an interactive medium made me absolutely ecstatic," explains Davien Sith of *Official RPG Maker* magazine, who fondly recalls his first encounter with RPG Maker which is now on its third iteration. "The feeling of playing a pre-made game doesn't compare to the accomplishment and satisfaction of playing your own," he says, adding, "the experience of creating stories and areas for your personal world is something I would consider a valuable asset in understanding what goes into creating games."

Almost instantly, this software obliterates the barrier between daydream and development. Adds Click Team's UK operations vice president Jason Darby, "Even though our programs make the whole process of programming the game easier, there's still the process of designing

levels, and thinking about how to structure the game, so you never escape the fact that you need to design your game." Clickteam has been working in this space for over ten years, most notably having produced 16-bit home computer programming software STOS BASIC and AMOS BASIC, then PC-based Klik & Play. The company's current range includes Multimedia Fusion and The Game Factory.

ACCESSIBLE DEVELOPMENT

Game Creators also appreciates how much this software can teach you about game design, and has a similar entrenchment in the sector, having started with the sale of DarkBASIC in 1999. Most recently, the outfit has produced FPS Creator. Richard Vanner the company's financial director comments, "We are essentially taking the black box stuff that only .0001% of the population have a chance of working out, and letting the rest of the users get creative and make their ideas come to life."

However, just because it's easier to make games doesn't mean everything that gets produced is wonderful. You're just as likely to download a dud as you are a great homebrew hit. "Some aren't worth the download," says Paul Hutchison, webmaster of RPG Pavilion, another of the large RPG Maker fansites. For using these programs, it seems you need just as much talent or creative drive as you would if you were working on a 'proper' game. But Hutchison quickly interjects, "Occasionally, something truly amazing comes out and surprises all of us. So in this aspect, the RPG Maker community is like a miniature games industry itself."



Haven't I Seen This Before?



Game-making software is, of course, nothing new and retroheads will most fondly remember a title called Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit as their first encounter with this type of program. Referred to by many as SEUCK, the package was published by Palace Software and developed by Sensible Software (of *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder* fame) for both Commodore 64 and Amiga, debuting on each format in 1988 and 1989 respectively. Although the versions obviously had differing tape and disk formats, and alternate graphical capabilities, there was really very little difference between them.

Primarily, SEUCK let users create top-down shooters, although dedicated use enabled skilled coders to make other kinds of games, too. Most, however, will remember the program's rather sophisticated sprite creation system and the fact that – as is often the case – most projects ended up being left half finished in favour of tinkering with the four bundled games created using SEUCK.



And like the games industry, the likes of RPG Maker and FPS Creator wouldn't survive without the people buying and using the software. Paramount to their success are the users themselves, and key communities have sprung up around each of the packages to either show off their ideas, exchange concepts, present tutorials, share tips or hold competitions.

FOR THE LOVE OF GAMES

Such a vocal community can have drawbacks, however. For updating RPG Maker, for instance, US publisher Agetec and Japanese development team Enterbrain asked the software's supportive community what it wanted to see in the sequel and promptly answered the demand. "While that sounds great, asking for certain things makes the software horribly complicated," explains Hutchison. And RPG Maker 2 made an uneasy transition to 3D game-making with detailed scripting, evolving so significantly in the basis of the users' demands that many likened the end product to an actual console development kit – it was so thorough that those same users were alienated almost immediately. (Fortunately, the

recent third game stepped away from over-complication and back to accessibility.)

Those enterprising spirits that manage to compile their own titles, are allowed to sell them as FPS Creator, Game Editor, RPG Maker, and the Clickteam products are all royalty-free after the first purchase. But this isn't as much of a draw as you may expect. "There are very few games that would be worth paying any money for at all, and normally the games that people intend to charge money for are complete garbage," says Hutchison. "I think it has to do with them not having their hearts in the right place. Someone making a game just out of love for their characters and story is almost always going to put out a much better creation than someone who only wants to make money from it."

Clickteam's Darby reckons that users aren't after commercial gain, "They don't do it for money but for the great feeling of releasing something that people can enjoy playing."

'PROGRAM' YOUR BRAIN

There is one thing using this software could earn you, however, and that's knowing some of

game design's fundamental principles that us normal gamers take for granted. Enemy patterns, environment design, weapon choices: they may seem obvious while you're playing the game, but when the product sits as an unformed idea, the thought behind selecting these is thrown into sharp relief, and so are crucial when it comes to the design of your own game.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURES

Everyone thinks that they can do better. Why not give it a go?

RPG MAKER



WEBSITE: www.enterbrain.co.jp/tkool/RPG_XP/eng

PRICE: \$60 (licence for XP PC version),
\$50 (US PS2 version)

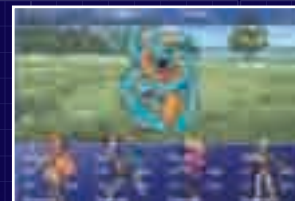
FORMAT: PC and PS2 (US/Japan)

DEMO: www.download.com

The RPG Maker series doesn't just work on PC; in the US and Japan, PS2 versions are available. The series is also notable given its manufacturer and developer is Enterbrain, the Japanese publisher that makes the Famitsu magazines and owns peripherals firm ASCII. Insiders kid that all the company needs to do is start making games itself to have the whole Japanese games market stitched up – and the follow-up gag is that the Maker series is a compromise so Nintendo, Capcom, Konami, et al won't be upset.

In terms of the software's capabilities, the complexity and variety of functions have morphed throughout its release – the series is currently on its third instalment, RPG Maker 3 (also available as RPG Maker XP) – but the diversity of the projects spawned from it show how much potential is on offer. That hugely competent fan-made Zelda sequels were produced with the software should prove what's possible, although obviously you're restricted to the RPG genre (although this has led fans to make numerous spoofs of the genre, such as the ridiculously named 'Second-To-Last Fantasy XXVI').

Initially booting up the software (especially the most recent, Windows XP version), can seem daunting, but we found that for beginners this is a great place to start, as the Internet is packed full of tutorials to help you get started.



GAME EDITOR

WEBSITE: www.game-editor.com

PRICE: \$15 (basic version), \$54.95 (with six months' free updates)

FORMAT: PC

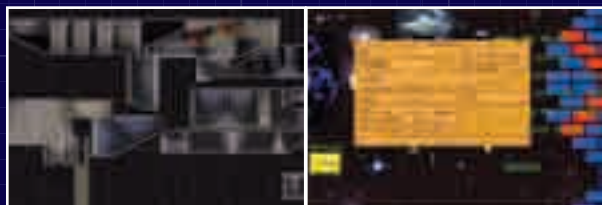
DEMO: See official site

Though not the greatest in this group, Game Editor is certainly worth a mention. This Brazilian piece of kit boasts that it's the only kind of software that lets you create games which can then be run on PCs, mobile devices or Linux computers. Admittedly, this is only so that the games can then be sold on – through the Game Editor official site, no less – but so far it doesn't look like a particularly potent medium for making or distributing games.

However, while first impressions suggest that Game Editor sacrifices quality in order to lower its complexity by focusing solely on two-dimensional games creation – something that most

beginners will be particularly thankful for – the scripting content is quite detailed and fairly easy to get to grips with. A sizeable community of users exists on the official forums, although the quality of the games available on the site also leaves little to be desired – most seeming to be basic games or copies of old classics.

Also, it's the cheapest of the bunch, with the basic version costing less than £10. The more expensive versions have free upgrades for new releases as they become available, but otherwise this is great for a would-be game maker with a small budget but big ideas.



FPS CREATOR

WEBSITE: www.fpscreator.com

PRICE: £29.99

FORMAT: PC

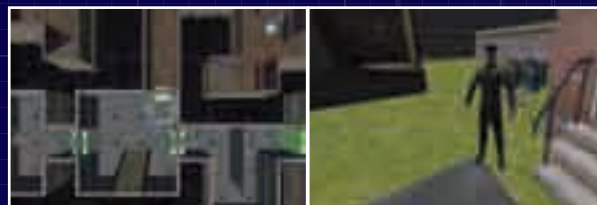
DEMO: See official site

It's no hollow marketing claim to say that you can create an environment to run around in within minutes, but you need time to refine your ideas. Projects need to be recompiled into a launchable .exe file each time you want to fix bugs. That's a situation multiplied depending how many levels you add or how complicated your enemy movement patterns are.

In fact, it wasn't really game design skills or debugging patience we took away from our use of FPS Creator – it was being reminded how generic the shooter genre has become. The title comes with pre-installed textures and themes, but these

are tired WWII and sci-fi elements – we're sick of *Halo* clones and *Medal Of Honor* regurgitations – so how ironic is it that a program designed to help you make your own projects offers nothing but dull textures and skins that are anything but cutting edge?

You can import your own designs, and the community at the official forum can answer any questions about doing so. There are many messages dedicated to adding new graphic packages, so the real strength of FPS Creator may be its graphical flexibility rather than its game-making one. It may beat level editors and mod-kits for accessibility, but in the end, you'll have to put the time in.



WONDERFOUR

A QUARTET OF QUALITY TITLES MADE WITH GAME-CREATION SOFTWARE

CACTUS BRUCE AND THE CORPORATE MONKEYS

www.bluteagames.com

With the enemy name's a self-referential nod to the game's indie upbringing and alternate web distribution method, the quirky presentation hides what really is a lot like a Parachute clone. However there is some added depth thanks to easy-to-grasp tactics.

Made using: Clickteam software

STAR WRAITH

www.starwraith3dgames.home.att.net

One of only a few successful series to have emerged from the amateur games scene (the fourth title is out now), this three dimensional space sim has helped its author turn a hobby into a business as the games sell from the homepage.

Made using: DarkBASIC

MONO

www.binaryzoo.com/games/mono/index.htm

This mouse and keyboard-played puzzler offers some entrancing visuals and a concept which the creator unashamedly refers to as 'part *Asteroids*, part *Robotron* and part *Paint Shop Pro*'. Still, it's an interesting blend, eh?

Made using: DarkBASIC

DUOtris

www.binaryzoo.com/games/duotris/index.htm

From the creator of *Mono*, this one's name may reveal it's block-falling elements, but a mirror image twist can make this more tactical than a game of *Tetris* and almost as fraught as *Lumines*. (There are two playing fields controlled with the same keys.)

Made using: DarkBASIC



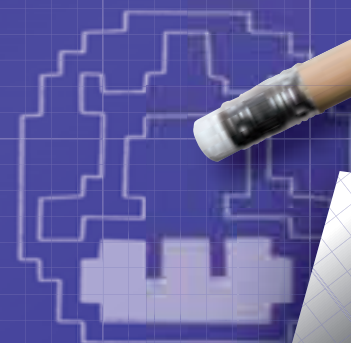
Even the most dedicated drive to see a project through to completion is invaluable. Says RPG Maker fan Hutchison, "I don't see it being a good way to secure work in real game development, other than testing to see if they have the dedication to stick with a project and see it through. With RPG Maker being as 'small' as it is, I can't see any game companies actually taking any games made with it seriously, which is a shame because quite a few games and people in our community make some of the 'professional' game creators out there look like complete hacks."

than your average budget game. If, however, you'd like to have a go (even if the end result is one of those unfinished vanity projects, arcade game clones, or dull concepts), over these pages we've had a look at the four main games-creation packages mentioned here. All have fairly low system requirements for the PC (one even works on the PlayStation2) – the real limit is how much time and dedication you'd want to put into mastering the software and refining your game idea. Are you up to the challenge?



GAMES FOR ALL

And he's right. While the scene may be flooded with unfinished vanity projects, clones of classic arcade games, or simply dull concepts that should have been left unmade, there are numerous notable games worthy of attention. If you're still planning to leave the game design to the games designers, then we've also provided details on four of the better games made using these programs. And get this: they're usually free or cheaper





The Players

TRAVELLER'S TALES IS RAPIDLY BECOMING ONE OF THE HOTTEST DEVELOPMENT STUDIOS IN THE COUNTRY. PAUL GARDNER, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT THE FIRM'S OXFORD STUDIO, CHATS ABOUT SEGA, MONKEYS AND HIS PASSION FOR HIS WORK

PAUL GARDNER

TRAVELLER'S TALES OXFORD

What better way to spend a freezing March afternoon than in the company of squirrel monkeys, a juggling otter and Sega? As we roamed the grounds of a snowy London Zoo, Paul Gardner of Traveller's Tales Oxford was busy fending off questions from an intrepid Italian journalist. He seemed keen to slip away for a **games™** chat about his upcoming project, the delectable *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*, the current interest in UK development talent within the industry, and Traveller's Tales' relationship with Sega.

"We were approached by Matt Woodley at Sega; there was something about the tone of it he really liked that he thought would be appropriate for *Monkey Ball*," says Gardner. Sega is notoriously strict when dealing with third-party dev houses; Sumo, in particular, was kept to very strict guidelines when porting *OutRun* to Xbox. Did Gardner find his hands tied when working on *Monkey Ball*? "They've been really open," he replies, "at the very beginning, Nagoshi was overseeing everything – he said he'd like to see what we came up with, then he'd give feedback, rather than dictating to us. Once they were comfortable that we were moving in the right direction, they gave us a lot of freedom". It seems Sega is less protective of new projects than existing games, "The main things Sega gave direction on were stuff like the tone, the storyline and such," Gardner says.

With its aforementioned dealings with Sheffield's Sumo Digital and now Traveller's Tales, Sega is taking an unusual interest in UK development houses, which has taken some by surprise. "I think it's a case of Sega Europe trying to establish itself," he explains, keen to shed light on the situation. "It's maybe a case of Sega trying to look at the properties it has with a more western work ethic. We've tried to keep the atmosphere of the game similar to the Japanese ones, but I think Sega just wants a different take on things, investigating western working environments and methods."

It may come as a shock that Gardner has only been in the industry seven years, and Traveller's Tales Oxford is only five years young. "I was an architect," he tells us, but his company is approaching games with a positive attitude,

surely a decisive factor for Sega. "There's a real mix of people here, we've looked outside the industry for a lot of our staff, but we've also got some really established games artists with, like, 12 years experience. There's a good mix of experience and people we bring up ourselves. It's been nice working with existing products and things that are quite well established, and looking for something in them. A lot of people, when they're given a licence to work under, see it as a burden. The opportunity to create something new, though, then transport a character into it – that's something we've worked hard to achieve with our games."

The company is remaining tight lipped about any upcoming projects, but Gardner seems to know what he wants when it comes to next-gen software, "It tends to happen with every console – the first thing people tend to concentrate on is photo realism," he says, "the things that really seem to appeal in the end, though, are titles that use the console in a more thoughtful way, stuff like *Katamari* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* on PS2 which are looking for a particular mood, rather than reproducing a photo." *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* certainly doesn't look to recreate any photograph we've ever seen. It's bright characters, strong characterisation and classic Japanese videogame sensibilities look set to continue the series' high standards.

All this talk of the industry is all well and good, and Traveller's Tales is without doubt a very exciting up and coming studio, but it's snowing, we've been hanging out with monkeys all day, and there's only one thing on our mind. Just who is the best *Monkey Ball* monkey? "Gon Gon," Gardner replies enthusiastically. An excellent choice, but why? "Apparently he's a pirate. Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, but Nagoshi's backstory says he's the son of a pirate". A **games™** exclusive – Gon Gon has just got even better. Will his amusing masturbation animation make it in after it was cruelly extracted from *Monkey Ball 2*? "We can put it in for you, if you like," Gardner smiles. Sometimes, life is good.



Super Monkey Ball Adventure is out June '06 on PSP, PS2 and GC.

**"PEOPLE TEND TO CONCENTRATE ON
PHOTO REALISM. WE'RE LOOKING FOR
A PARTICULAR MOOD RATHER THAN
REPRODUCING A PHOTO"**

PAUL GARDNER

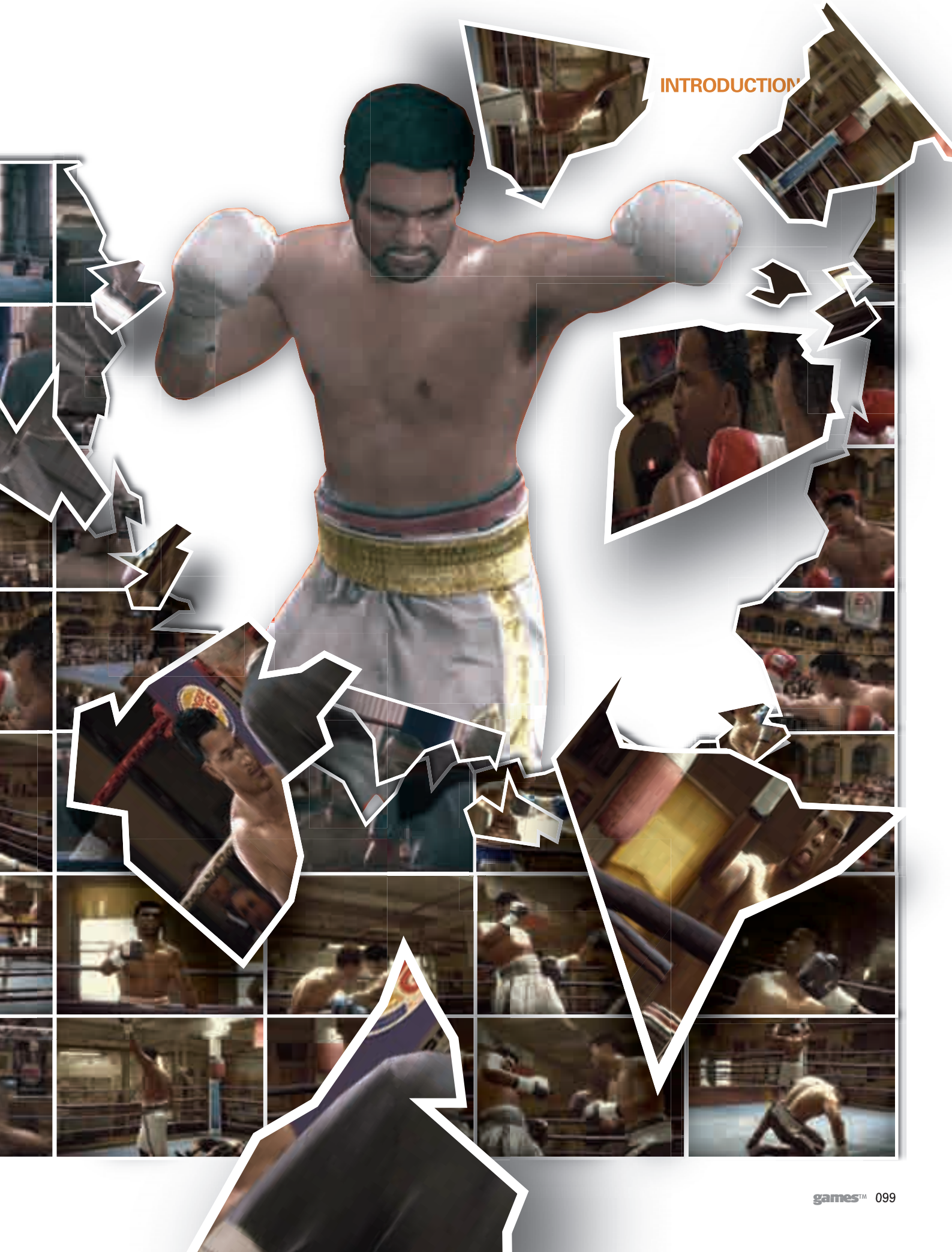
REVIEWS

Ghost Recon:		
Advanced Warfighter	Multi	100
24: The Game	Multi	104
Sonic Riders	Multi	106
Drakengard 2	PS2	107
Driver: Parallel Lines	Multi	108
Blazing Angels	Multi	110
Fight Night Round 3	Multi	112
Splinter Cell Essentials	PSP	114
Metal Gear Solid 3:		
Subsistence	PS2	115
Mega Man Powered Up	PSP	116
Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams	PS2	118
Exit	PSP	120
Full Spectrum Warrior:		
Ten Hammers	Multi	122
Commandos Strike Force	DS	124
The Outfit	360	126

THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?





INTRODUCTION



OUT OF THE FORESTS AND INTO THE URBAN JUNGLE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

Xbox 360

OTHER FORMATS

Xbox, PS2, PC

ORIGIN

US

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DEVELOPER

Red Storm

PRICE

£44.99

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1-2 (2-16 Online)

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

With fevered anticipation the warmongers among us awaited the review code of *Advanced Warfighter* this month. Mere moments after it had securely entered the building, we crowded around the games area like pedestrians around a car crash. Fond memories of heavy firefights, stealth missions and countless hours on *Ghost Recon 2* came flooding back. For you see, this third instalment under the Tom Clancy flag was arguably the best looking game during the build-up to the 360's launch, impressing both fans and non-*Recon* gamers alike.

The most immediate difference (forgoing the ☐ superb visuals, which we'll get to shortly) is the extraction of the elite special forces Ghost unit from the jungles of Kazakhstan and North Korea (*Ghost Recon 2*) – which has always been the insignia of past games – and their subsequent insertion into the bustling streets, buildings and open spaces of Mexico City a year later. It's urban

warfare at its most sublime and the idyllic setting to show off Ubisoft's ever-improving *Ghost Recon* series.

The 360 has already produced some ☐ impressive games, and while many of them look great, *Advanced Warfighter* is perhaps the first to truly look and feel like a next-generation game for this next-generation console. Built from the ground up on the 360 format, enabling Ubisoft to fully utilise the technology, textures, lighting and state-of-the-art physics, and so on, *Advanced Warfighter* lives up to the hype of the HD trailers that have congested Internet gaming sites for months.

The draw distance is seemingly endless and ☐ the level of detail in characters, weapons, vehicles, streets and even furniture scenery is awe-inspiring. It's all too easy to get lost in detail, and quite often during the first few missions we'd stop to take in the stunning settings, only



■ The transition from mission-to-mission isn't seamless, but the way it has been implemented is the next best thing for sure.



■ The level detail is truly remarkable, with advertisements, graffiti and litter covering much of the city. Make your way through the hostile city streets using parked cars, vans, benches, walls and anything else that will stop a bullet from ripping through your flesh.

CLASS OF 2013

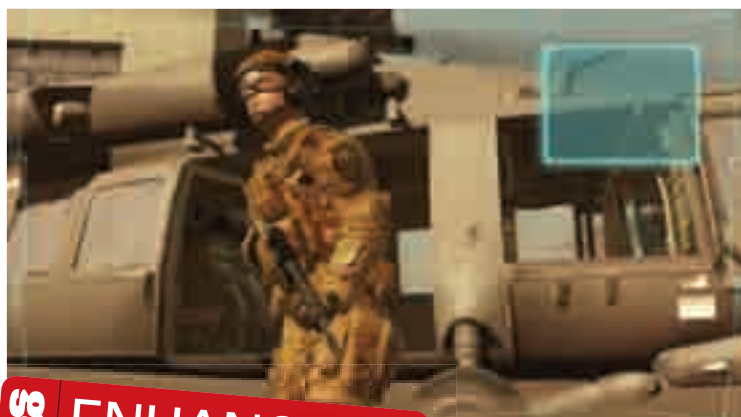
There are four classes of soldier: Rifleman (good at moving while shooting), Grenadier (good with explosives), Gunner (good at shooting full-auto) and Marksman (good at accurate, slow fire). But it doesn't stop there, oh no. Each class of soldier has six statistics that affect gameplay: Accuracy, Aim Time, Ammo-Carrying Capacity, Breath Management, Reload Time and Recoil Management. If you thought *Advanced Warfighter* was just your typical point-and-shoot game then your Intel is well and truly incorrect. In the battlefield you have to choose the weapons that best suit your mission, your surroundings and your skills, otherwise you won't live for long. Hoo-rah!



to take a bullet to the torso, or worse – a straight headshot. Not the safest thing to be caught doing during a gunfight.

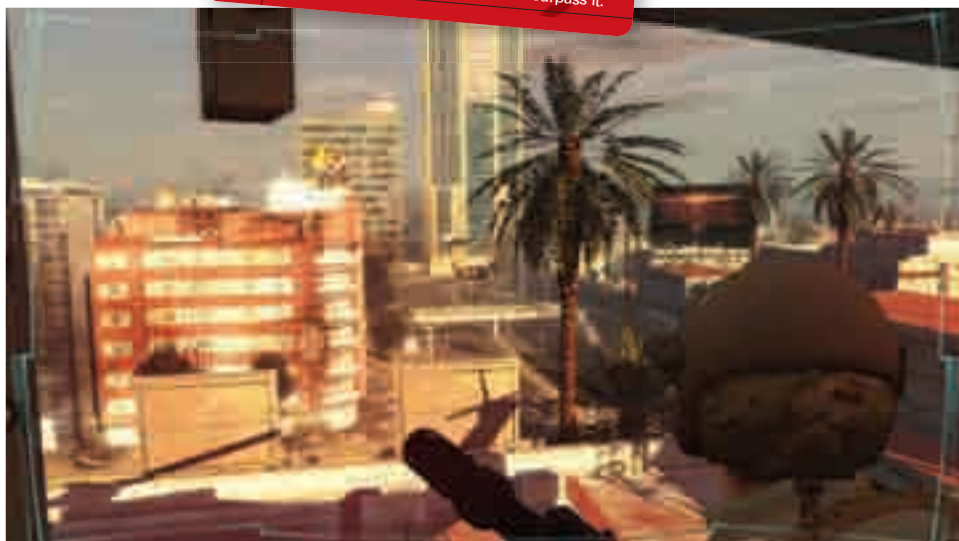
The missions and transition between objectives ☐ help maintain a continuous flow throughout the game. Rather than the traditional static debriefing screen at the end of each mission, your debriefings and briefings are now carried out in transit to your next objective, whether it's riding a helicopter gunship à la *Apocalypse Now* or in an APC (Armoured Personal Carrier). There are 11 missions in total, plus one training mission. Each successful mission completion results in the much-adored achievement points. Unlike in *Recon 2*, the difficulty from mission to mission isn't that noticeable – but try playing it on Hard, and your enemy has quicker reactions and will always take the headshot.

Whereas in prior *Recon* versions you could ☐ settle everything with excessive force and swift timing, *Advanced Warfighter* challenges you to embrace the tactical nature of urban warfare, either by drawing enemy soldiers to your position or by utilising the rest of your Ghost team to flank them. Hell, even some well-placed smoke grenades will get you past specific ambushes where gunfire fails. The gameplay is varied, relying on stealth and extreme force in shifting degrees in differing situations. Throughout the course of the single-player game we never tired, never once wanted



games™ **ENHANCED**
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
VISUALS: A new level of beauty for the next level of console – this looks the mutt's nuts.
MULTI-PLAYER: GR2 was a great Xbox Live game, but the maps and options far surpass it.

■ Bad ass mutha f---er! Captain Scott Mitchell is the Ghost team leader and one heroic son of a bitch to boot.



"IT'S URBAN WARFARE AT ITS MOST SUBLIME AND THE IDYLIC SETTING TO SHOW OFF UBISOFT'S EVER-IMPROVING GR SERIES"



■ Some of the missions require you to work around the clock after all, the night is the best time to catch the enemy napping.

to stop, and were saddened for the game to end after a chaotic but rewarding eight hours.

To aid the soldier of the future (everything is based upon actual US Army research) you have the same weapon classes available to you as prior *Recons* (see 'Class of 2013' boxout). Unlike previous releases, however, the screen is designed around your view through the Ghost visor (now a signature look of *Advanced Warfighter*), which houses a monocular – a Cross-Com link to situational awareness and command of the urban battlefield. With this you command your Ghost squad, the occasionally optional allied tanks, air strikes and UAV 3 drone – a fantastic new addition. The UAV 3 can be sent to scout out enemy positions via your Intel Map, informing you of enemy numbers, locations and sometimes ambushes. Intel saves lives, and using the UAV 3 will save yours on more than one occasion.

There's a lot to admire about *Advanced Warfighter*. Its looks, the urban warfare setting and the control of tanks and gunships during the course of the game (you even get to man the mini-gun on a gunship and clear the landing area of enemy presence before reaching your drop point). There's also many subtle effects to raise a smile, such as being able to heal injured members of your squad (although they can't



■ Don't fancy poking your head around the corner. No sweat, the gun that allows you to look around walls without getting shot makes a return.

FAQs

Q. FPS OR THIRD-PERSON SHOOTER?

Both. As with previous *Recons* you can select either way as your chosen viewpoint.

Q. ANY ADVANTAGE FOR EITHER VIEW?

You get to see over obstacles and around walls in third-person as opposed to first-person.

Q. ANY DOWNSIDE TO EITHER VIEW?

In first-person you still, annoyingly, don't get to see your gun, unlike in most FPSs.

GHOST RECON 2: SS



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



RAINBOW SIX 3: BA

Another slight disappointment is that for whatever reason, the physics of *Recon* will not allow you to crawl under a lorry for cover, but will let you fire under it – a pity, as with new technology comes higher expectations. You can also climb over some obstacles where your path through the level requires it, but you cannot walk up or climb over non-scripted walls that are sometimes no higher than your knees. Frustrating. One final and obvious point made by one of the team is that in a city of over 20 million people, why do you never see a civilian anywhere? Perhaps that's why you cannot enter

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQ.

URBAN WARFARE: GR leaves the jungles of the east to wage war within those of the west.

ADDITION: Once you've sampled the delights of multi-player *Recon* you'll never look back.

MULTI-PLAYER THRILLS

There are 16 pre-set games modes, with an apparent possibility of over 1,000 games modes to create and play – although you're unlikely to see that many being used. In Solo and Team modes, players choose to play one of three events (each having additional customisation options): Elimination – kill as many opponents as possible; Territory – control (in different ways) zones; Objective – control objects such as flags, actors, and so on. You also have the opportunity to create your own character identity. You start by changing your default character in the identity setup, and when you're happy with your appearance you can save your favourite weapon in each class as your default gun, and from then on you are given that weapon at the start of each match.





■ Occasionally, you'll have to do a gunship flyby and utilise the helicopter's mounted mini-gun in order to clear the drop-off point of enemy occupation.



■ Crawl along your stomach and sneak up on the enemy – some well-placed shots will put an end to their evil existence.



buildings or houses, because every gringo and his wife have locked themselves in...

Finicky points aside, a defining moment in the excellence of *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* is the multi-player gaming experience. Expanding on the options and implementation exponentially upon previous games, there are three initial games modes to select from: Solo, Team and Co-Op (see 'Multi-player Thrills' boxout for Solo and Team game modes). The latter offers a unique Co-Op experience, whereby rather than repeating the single-player missions, Red Storm has designed four specialist missions set in Nicaragua, which require the players to work together and employ co-operative tactics. Impressively, there are ten multi-player maps to choose from, all created specifically for the multi-player mode, with diverse levels designed for varying numbers of players and specific weapons; some are designed for close combat while others suit the sniper among us. The matches are smooth, the fights fierce and the competition exhilarating – even more so than the *Recon* games that have come before as well as the *Rainbow Six* offerings. The UAV 3 drone from single-player can also be utilised to spot enemy positions (although it can

be shot down) using the Cross-Com. The Cross-Com is also your communication device with your team-mates – use it to set waypoints, select teammates and order drones.

Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter is eye-candy at its most delicious. As a single-player game it is very enjoyable, but as a multi-player Xbox Live game it raises the bar for all others to follow. We thoroughly recommend exploring the single-player game, but treat it as a training exercise for the real battle that lies ahead... that of Xbox Live multi-player, Semper Fi marines.

VERDICT 9/10

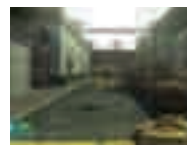
NEXT-GEN WARFARE FOR A NEXT-GEN MACHINE



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

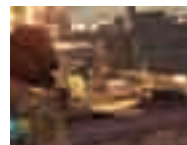
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

10 MINS



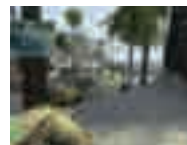
○ You have just completed the training mode and will now be salivating over the breathtaking visuals as you begin your mission in Mexico City.

4 HOURS



○ You should be about halfway through the game now and still you salivate over the sumptuous visuals. You're now battle-hardened and loving every minute.

5 DAYS



○ You've completed the single-player mission and are now in the middle of a fire-fight with your mates online, looking to take out the first Yank who calls you a pussy.

"A DEFINING MOMENT IN THE EXCELLENCE OF GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER IS THE MULTI-PLAYER GAMING EXPERIENCE"



■ We don't remember seeing anything quite this graphic in the TV series. Still, the ragdoll physics engine is suitably over the top, matching the histrionics of the storyline.



■ Sniping involves little more than some basic cursor manipulation, but a headshot is satisfying all the same.



■ Even the annoying 24 telephone ring makes it into the videogame. Worth it just to hear the immortal 'Almeida'.

24: THE GAME

THE FOLLOWING TAKES PLACE BETWEEN 6AM AND 6AM

Some things in life will just never change. Just as Chelsea will inevitably take the Premiership crown this season, Sony Cambridge's long-awaited *24: The Game* will make more money than a Nina Myers double cross. An IP as lucrative as *24* is simply a licence to print money; good news for Sony, as *24* is spread as thinly as Jack Bauer's wiry hair.

The ideas are there, the basic gameplay is a mixture of driving against the clock, interrogations and third-person shooting, and the trademark split-screen editing techniques from the show are captured immaculately. Unfortunately, in the developer's quest for variety and sheer size (it all takes place over 100 levels), the potential for style and panache is lost in a mire of muddy graphics, bad auto-aim and largely pointless, randomly generated puzzles.

Jack is having another of his trademark 'bad days', and as such spends much of his time shooting identikit terrorists across Los Angeles. At its core, the aiming system works quite well; the auto-aim will highlight a foe, but can be manipulated to attempt a headshot or pick off a flailing limb. All is well and good until someone decides to run at you. At this point, whichever

character you happen to be controlling has a panic attack and forgets all about auto-aim, deciding instead to fire at a picture of the President hanging on the wall or a conveniently placed crate. Therefore, the best method to attack is to retreat and fire from a distance. Not exactly what you'd expect from Jack.

The dodgy shooting is matched by the equally erratic enemy AI. Foes can often be seen hidden behind large orange barrels with the words Highly Flammable emblazoned on the sides, or rushing into your fire like foolish chickens. Matters are not helped when the now standard stealth missions rear their ugly heads; even when playing as non-weapon-trained Kim, you still find yourself shooting guards because it's easier and less laborious than creeping past, especially as taking cover behind a wall is no guarantee that you actually are in cover.

The majority of the other level types do not improve the experience vastly either. The driving missions feel somewhat unfinished, highlighted by the lack of an animation for getting out of the car; more time seems to have been spent getting Keifer Sutherland's hair the correct shade of blonde (which it is, by the way). The puzzles seem frivolous, little more than

FAQs

Q. IS IT REALLY THAT BAD?

Fans of the series will find some merit in this; gamers will be disappointed and demand a shorter, better game.

Q. ARE PEOPLE FROM THE SERIES INVOLVED?

Yes, all the actors and some of the scriptwriters helped. Chris Moyle's face is on Carr the terrorist. Yes, really.

Q. WHEN IS IT SET?

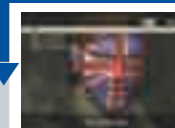
Neatly between series two and three, because this was when they started developing it.

50 CENT: BULLETPROOF



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MGS 3

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PlayStation2

ORIGIN

UK

PUBLISHER

Sony

DEVELOPER

In-House

PRICE

£39.99

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

24 may all be set in LA, but that does not give the developers free reign to use the same sections of levels and maps repeatedly to lengthen their videogame. It's pretty disheartening to see the same respawning explosive barrels time and time again when you're trying to immerse yourself in the Jack Bauer experience. The game's final level, the yacht, is an exception however, featuring more character and personality than everything that had preceded it, and provides a fitting setting for the drama of the climactic scenes. The less said about the final boss, though, the better.

games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

PATHETIC BOSS: The final boss can be killed with a single shot – bit of an anticlimax.
HOLLYWOOD MEN: Lock up your daughters! Tony Almeida looks something like a hunchback with a flat backside.



■ Everybody loves shooting helicopters. See *Metal Gear Solid*, *Devil May Cry 2*, and every lightgun game ever made.



■ The puzzles in *24: The Game* are a particularly disappointing addition. Let's get back to the action already.



■ Puzzles are a fairly vacuous affair involving little more than basic block movement.

simple letter-swap puzzles or timed button pushing. Although variety is obviously welcome in any game, we'd rather play the master of one style than the 'Jack' of all.

The real meat of any 24 game should be the feeling of 'being' Jack Bauer, and despite its obvious shortcomings, Sony Cambridge's effort does capture the great man very well, even down to the minute details such as how he leans up against a wall. The interrogations, for example, capture the tension of the show far better than the mindless blasting. Bauer's trademark temper flares wildly in these sections, with him pulling out all the stops to get answers, forcing his gun into terrorists' faces and generally worrying his already troubled heart. Unfortunately, actually completing an interrogation is far too random, meaning each repetition diminishes the tension considerably.

And repetition is something players will have to get used to, as the difficulty setting is, quite frankly, schizophrenic. One minute you're blasting through a sniper level without a care in the world,

the next a helicopter machine gun is turning you into a cheese grater with seemingly no way around it. Success is largely based on a methodology of learning exactly how the developers want you to progress through each section, then carrying it out. As far as we remember, though, Jack Bauer doesn't like taking orders.

Despite all of this, there's still an enjoyable 24 experience hidden beneath the tedium. The familiar digital clock, although having little relevance on the game proper, enters at moments of high tension, giving players a genuine sense of urgency. The aforementioned split-screens that occur during gameplay actually help you and will make fans grin, as will the use of all the real actors' voices and the excellent score. Its sense of style is so good that it really highlights the shortcomings of the rest of the game, leaving you yearning for a more fulfilling time in Bauer's shoes.

If Sony Cambridge had placed as much emphasis on the gameplay mechanics as it had recreating the show's style, then *24: The Game*

would have been an excellent action title. As it is, it's more the videogaming equivalent of Jack's daughter – stylish, relatively fun, but incapable of helping itself.



VERDICT 5/10

12: THE GAME WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER

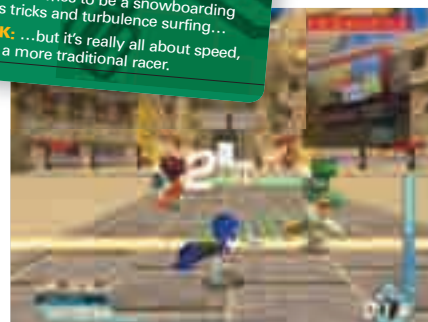




■ It'll take time to get used to *Sonic Riders*. If you really want to, that is.



■ There'll be no dragging of knuckles here, these boards are fast.



■ All the favourite Sonic characters are here. Will it be enough?

DETAILS	
	PlayStation2
	Xbox, GameCube
	Japan
	Sega
	In-House
	£39.99
	Out Now
	1-4

SONIC AND CO GET FAST AND FURIOUS

SONIC RIDERS

Your first few races with *Sonic Riders* will be entirely baffling. There's no tutorial, and at the beginning of the first Story mode you're thrown into quite a difficult race with absolutely no knowledge whatsoever, and left to fend for yourself. You will fail your first few races, probably disastrously, and it will take a few more before you get to grips with what *Sonic Riders* is trying to be. Its mix of full-on, high-speed racing and snowboard-esque vehicles is innovative but counter-intuitive, and the game's controls turn out to have much, much less depth than you would expect from such a potentially ambitious hybrid. The game only makes sense once you come to terms with its essentially basic nature.

It's only when you play something like *Sonic Riders* at length that you begin to realise just how difficult it is to get a character-based racer right. Sega fan-service here isn't lacking – the game's wide variety of classic characters cannot

fail to please, and the basic, vaguely ridiculous storyline feels somehow appropriate. The way the characters are balanced in the races, though, is flawed: where most differences are negligible (slight disparities in speed, handling or jumping height), some are race-winning (some characters simply can't grind, for instance). The complete absence of any items, too, means that if you get stuck at the back of the pack, there's very little to be done about it except wait for someone else to make a mistake, and hope that you catch up.

Indeed, the reason for putting gaming's fastest selection of characters on a jet-powered snowboard escapes us, and it feels completely unnecessary. Performing tricks is so simple it's practically automatic – when riding an opponent's slipstream, for instance, you could put the controller down entirely and it would make no difference. What's more, the boards can easily run out of air power which annoyingly interrupts races – although accumulating air boosts the power of your board thereby giving an incentive for good performance, running out usually means losing a race by default due to the game's unforgiving nature. There is little depth to the control of the boards, and we don't see why this shouldn't have been an on-foot racer (presumably, someone took a look at the success of *SSX* and decided that Sonic needed a jet board just as Shadow needed guns).

Sonic Riders is not without value, especially for the Sega hardcore. However, its balance is ultimately flawed and the inclusion of jet-boards feels almost arbitrary. It could have been a novel new twist on the character racer, but instead *Sonic Riders* falls flat.

VERDICT 5/10
NOVEL, BUT ULTIMATELY DISAPPOINTING

SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SSX ON TOUR



DRAKENGARD 2

DUNGEONS, DRAGONS AND INESCAPABLE BOREDOM

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN

Japan

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DEVELOPER

Square Enix

PRICE

£39.99

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1

You have to question Ubisoft's decision to release *Drakengard 2* in western territories some nine months after it hit Japanese store

shelves. Perhaps there's a hitherto untapped market for poorly designed, ugly dragon games in this country. Perhaps Ubisoft believes that the name Square Enix is enough to ensure sales to the rabid RPG crowd. Whatever the reason for the decision, it's a poor one as *Drakengard 2* is a truly dreadful videogame.

Taking control of Nowe, a young spiky haired chap carved from the same piece of generic polygonal rock as every other male lead in Japanese fantasy gaming, is a mightily unfulfilling experience. A swordsman in the *Dynasty Warriors* mould, complete with an all-powerful one-button combo, his only interesting feature – and, indeed, the game's – is his relationship with Legna, an enormous blue dragon. As with the first *Drakengard*, players can climb atop the monster and unleash fiery hell on the goblins that threaten to overrun your allies.

This sounds like a lot of fun, and it should be, but the mix of non-existent AI, awful camera controls and grotty visuals mean that your time spent on the magnificent beast is as inspiring as a trip to the post office. However, seeing as the

majority of the game forces you to be on foot, it matters little.

These dragonless sections ☐ feature level design that an early PSOne title would be ashamed of, and combat so dreary it makes Koei's *Warriors* titles seem positively enthralling. Weapons can be levelled up. To conquer some areas, you need the skills of Nowe's female companion Eris. And you gain experience every time you defeat one of the insipidly drawn enemies. Stop us if you've heard this before.

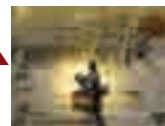
Drakengard 2's only saving grace is that ☐ it's mercifully easy. Swarms of foes can be cut down with mere button mashing; it's not frustrating, just deathly boring. Everything works as it should – there are no game-breaking glitches *Driv3r* style – but it's such an exercise in drear that only a masochist would get any pleasure out of it, and even then they'd have to ignore the hackneyed sub-Uwe Boll narrative. Aren't games supposed to entertain?

VERDICT 3/10

DULLER THAN A RAINY THURSDAY AFTERNOON

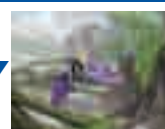


DRAKENGARD



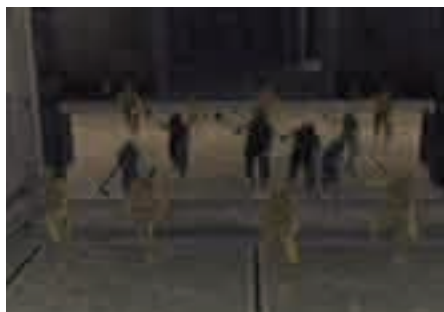
JUST LIKE

WORSE THAN



PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

■ The angry hordes who bought this, charged straight down to Ubisoft HQ armed with sticks.



■ We got it into our heads that the view from a thousand feet up was a bit better than this. Silly us.





THE COMEBACK KID

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

Driver: *Parallel Lines* is in a unique position for a videogame. Not often does a title come to market that people actually want to see fail, but after the horror show that was *Driv3r* (and the subsequent witch hunt that followed), the minute *Parallel Lines* was announced, the industry's collective cynicism gland nearly erupted.

Unfortunately for the nay sayers, the fourth iteration of the *Driver* franchise is nowhere near as bad as many have expected. In fact, it's one of the better city-based videogames; squarely trouncing the likes of *True Crime: New York City*, but without ever reaching the heights of the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Atari and Reflections have clearly taken on board a lot of the criticism levelled at *Driv3r* – and it shows within minutes of play (the main character doesn't sink into the road, for example, and dead bodies don't drop from the heavens at sporadic intervals).

Driv3r's other main downfall (overshadowed by the quite astonishing technical issues) was its lack of personality and charm. It was such a sterile and characterless game that felt so joyless when placed next to the mischief of *GTA*. Aware of this, Tanner has been replaced by the slickly animated TK – a hip walking cliché of Seventies cool, who struts around the New York City streets with a confident swagger and some very 'Loreal' hair physics. *Parallel Lines* is a stylish game; everything from the cut-scenes and dialogue to the excellent soundtrack has been constructed meticulously to produce an almost Tarantino simulacrum of 1970s Americana (or, indeed, 2006 – *Driver 4*'s 'twist' sees TK thrust into the present day in the story's second half, complete with updated city textures and modern vehicles).

Not just content with injecting a much-needed dose of personality into its flagging series, Reflections has drawn the focus of *Driver* back

FAQs

Q. HOW BAD IS IT?
Nowhere near as bad as you want it to be.

Q. WHY NOT?
It's solid, entertaining and nice to look at.

Q. SO NO GLITCHES AT ALL?
Probably even fewer than a *Grand Theft Auto* title, actually.

BREAKING THE LAW

One of *Parallel Lines*' most interesting features, and one of its few innovations, is the way it deals with police attention. Two separate bars adorn the bottom of the screen, one depicting the 'heat' on your current vehicle, the other your own notoriety. If the cops don't ever see your face and you manage to escape their attention before swapping cars, the heat goes back down to zero. Likewise, they might know who you are, but won't see you while you're driving unless you stop right in front of a police car. It's actually a superior method to that of *GTA*; if only the police weren't so superhumanly effective you might be able to get away with something.





■ The car damage model is once again excellent.



■ Meet The Kid, also known as TK he comes rocking approximately 93.2 per cent more personality than Tanner.



■ Rumours that *Parallel Lines* includes a *Tony Hawk's*-style 'grinding' mode have not been confirmed.

to where it originated – the driving itself. Out-of-the-car moments are kept to a minimum and, while still improved greatly, are given far less prominence than the vehicular action. Throwing around the fuel-guzzling muscle cars is a much more liberating and thrilling ride than in any of the previous games – trees and lampposts can be knocked down as opposed to stopping you dead, and cornering is far more forgiving than before, all of which mean that *Parallel Lines* allows for the dramatic Hollywood chases the series is supposed to provide rather than the frustrating stop-start trial and error of *Driv3r*. The lighter, twitchier handling suits the genre; it's clearly an attempt to recreate *GTA's* successful driving model. Only the lack of variety in how different cars handle lets it down – a lot of the vehicles found cruising the streets handle far too similarly.

The overly dramatic cornering is not the only area *Parallel Lines* cribs from its Rockstar cousin – the entire game screams *San Andreas* at every turn. Pedestrians now shout 'humorous' one-liners, cars can be modded to within an inch of their lives, and the missions themselves are so familiar that players will be second-guessing what's coming next with alarming regularity. If a game must plagiarise, though, stealing from the finest is the way to go, and as a result *Driver's* New York City is one of the most vibrant and interesting one could hope to take a virtual tour of. It manages to capture an intangible sense of 'place' – driving by the sea feels significantly different to slow crawling through the traffic of downtown Manhattan, surely the crux of any game that offers a full city to drive around.



■ Pedestrians can now be brutalised by the bonnet of your car. About time, too.

However, while the liberal borrowing from ☐ *GTA* has aided *Driver's* personality crisis, it has also stripped it of any self-esteem it once had. Playing the same types of missions Tommy Vercetti and Carl Johnson have been tearing through for years is ultimately far too dull, and makes *Parallel Lines* feel like a game that's resigned never to be as successful as Rockstar's infamous cash cow.

Perhaps to combat this malaise, *Driver 4* ☐ has been made incredibly difficult. Just driving to and from the missions takes so much diligence and concentration so as not to attract the attention of the over-zealous police force, it becomes more of a challenge than the mission itself. Although more realistic (aside from the police's Rodney King levels of brutality), having the cops chase you for a simple speeding infringement is a shame when the cars (and bikes) are so much fun to drive. Those lacking in patience could well give up before TK ever makes it to the present day.

As an example of how to recreate a city in a ☐ fun and enjoyable way, *Parallel Lines* should be admired, and the improvement over *Driv3r* is massive (in fact, it may well be the least glitchy game of its genre), but there's an overriding feeling of 'too little, too late'. Reflections has probably not achieved enough with the latest *Driver* to atone for *Driv3r's* multitude of sins, and many may feel they have been burned one too many times by stepping outside the safety of a Rockstar world. If the series makes it to a fifth outing, perhaps it will finally find the balance that makes *Grand Theft Auto* so fun to play. By then, though, Rockstar may well be out of sight.



VERDICT 6/10

A VAST IMPROVEMENT, BUT SUPREMELY UNORIGINAL

WE SHALL FIGHT THEM ON THE XBOX, WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER...

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

DETAILS

PS2 PS2 PS2

FORMAT REVIEWED

Xbox 360

OTHER FORMATS

Xbox, PC

ORIGIN

Romania

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DEVELOPER

In-House

PRICE

£49.99

RELEASE

31 March

PLAYERS

1-2 (2-20 Online)



For us Brits, the performance of our air force during the Second World War is a period of tremendous pride. The Nazi war machine was cutting a swathe through Europe, the French had surrendered and America was taking a suspiciously long time to get its uniform on. After the catastrophe of Dunkirk, the RAF was all that stood between Hitler and total domination of Europe. Vastly outnumbered, our Spitfires took to the air and put an end to the Nazi 'Blitzkrieg' once and for all. It was The Battle Of Britain – the decisive moment in the war – when a seemingly invincible evil was stopped in its tracks, allowing the US just enough time to check its hair in the mirror and join the fight. It's pure drama, pure spectacle, and the next-gen capabilities of the Xbox 360 are the perfect platform on which to recreate the fight.

Things certainly start well. You begin *Blazing Angels'* training mission and take control of a beautifully realised bi-plane, soaring over the beautifully realised English countryside, showered by rays of beautifully realised sunlight. All the pieces seem to be in place. Then your character speaks. In an American accent. Ghostly



memories of Ben Affleck saving the RAF in *Pearl Harbor* come flooding back. For ardent war gamers, an American defending the troops in Dunkirk is as out of place as a Brit defending the ships of Pearl Harbor. It goes against the grain of history for the sake of a token storyline. And it jars. By itself this isn't a huge problem – most World War II games reinforce the myth that the Americans won the day, and a sizeable chunk are very good – but it's symptomatic of a series of tiny oversights that alone would be inconsequential, but together become damaging to the overall experience.

Spread over 18 missions, the game encompasses the major air battles of the Second World War. It's a killer concept that allows you to fight in a variety of locales, from Africa and London to Japan and the Philippines. Whether city, country, mountain or desert, the landscapes are simply fantastic to look at, and the cleverly used weather effects add an extra dimension to each environment – flying blind through a choking sandstorm, using mountain mist to shield your progress. And that's the frustrating thing. In purely visceral terms *Blazing Angels* is stunning, brilliantly evoking the sights

HEROES OF THE PACIFIC

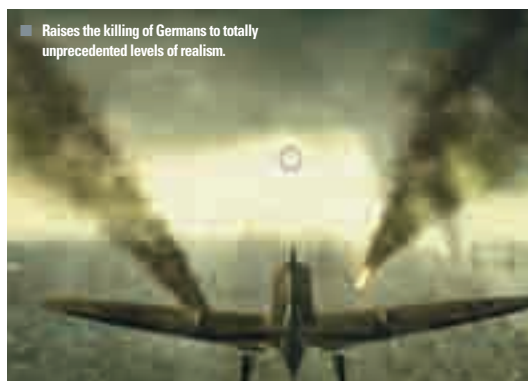
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

CRIMSON SKIES



Well, that's the 'blazing' part taken care of. We can only assume there's an angel flying the damned thing.



Raises the killing of Germans to totally unprecedented levels of realism.

FAQs

Q. IS IT JUST SHOOTING OTHER PLANES?

Mostly. Well, you also get to drop bombs, fire missiles and shoot torpedoes. There are a few surveillance missions too.

Q. THAT SOUNDS A BIT LIMITING?

Tell us something we don't know.

Q. MULTI-PLAYER?

Yes. You can fight against up to 20 players online, head to head or on co-operative missions. Despite the faults, that's one hell of a reason to buy.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SCOPE: Incorporates everything from Dunkirk and The Blitz to Pearl Harbor and Midway.
COMMAND: You can give orders, albeit limited ones, to a squadron of planes.



■ The locales are beautifully rendered, with war-torn London being a particularly impressive highlight.



■ It may look cool, but in the interests of being able to see more than bugger all, flying directly into the sun is not advised.

and sounds of battle. There is chaos when there needs to be chaos, and tranquillity when there needs to be tranquillity. The wide variety of planes ding up nicely when you take a hit, and each one has its own distinct look and feel. Even the engine noises are authentic. It's only when you go beneath the surface that the annoying little cracks begin to show.

Ubisoft has tried to produce a user-friendly flight simulation, and it's a wise choice. The control method is instantly accessible and, for a while, a lot of fun. Destroying enemy planes is reassuringly simple, while the ability to give your squad orders allows the proceedings a tactical edge they might otherwise have lacked. However, as you progress and the difficulty level increases, here's where the problems start to reveal themselves. Control of the camera is frustratingly limited, you can lock it to your nearest target but no more than that.

It's all well and good being able to order a team to engage the enemy on your tail, but whether you can look behind you is dictated by the machine's impression of where the immediate danger is. Fine in a one-on-one dogfight, a severe disadvantage in a sky full of planes. Air-to-ground attacks are hampered

MASTER AND COMMANDER

In order to bring a little variety to the age-old 'search and destroy' nature of flight sims, *Blazing Angels*, like many current military action titles, has adopted a squad-based combat system. Exactly how many planes are under your command varies from mission to mission, but the command list is always the same: attack, defend and return to formation. You can also order individual members of your squad to perform specific tasks – repairing any damage you may have taken, covering your tail and singling out troublesome enemy fighters. Progress through certain levels is all but impossible without intelligent use of your squad.



by the same problem. The relevant targeting reticle is very difficult to see unless you angle the plane toward the earth – the source of many unnecessary hits and unavoidable crashes. Tolerance is a virtue with a game like this, and an oversight like the camera can be compensated for with a little extra practice. However, the repetitive nature of the majority of missions soon takes its toll, and the primary motivation for progressing becomes the desire to see how nice the next level looks, not the love of playing the game. *Blazing Angels'* niggles are basically minor, but they are only exacerbated by this perpetual feeling of déjà vu.

It's a problem that's extremely difficult to avoid. Search and destroy mechanics are inherent in flight simulations, and without the ability to get out of your plane, mission variety will inevitably suffer. The truth is that the power of the Xbox 360 brings with it great expectations, and for all its sumptuous visuals and razor-sharp sound, *Blazing Angels* simply doesn't feel next generation. Like a few 360 titles since launch, it's just an Xbox game in snappier clothes.



XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW

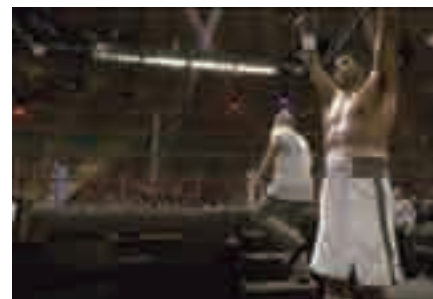


The only way the technically superior 360 version differs from the Xbox is in graphics and sound (it does hold its own here, too). Planes, missions and online action is all the same.

VERDICT 6/10
 VISUALLY STUNNING, BUT A FEW TOO MANY FLAWS



■ Ali versus Frasier – just one of the many classic encounters you can recreate in the ESPN Classic mode. The presentation and pre-match FMV in this mode is as immaculate as you would expect from an EA Sports title.



■ R Kelly's favourite – the great man himself, Mr Muhammed Ali. EA has captured his attitude and movement superbly.



■ The inter-round healing returns, although it is now somewhat more streamlined and efficient.

FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, STING LIKE A SLEDGEHAMMER

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

FAQs

Q. IS RICKY HATTON IN IT?

Yep, the Hitman's in there, bringing the pain.

Q. WHAT'S A GOOD CUSTOM SOUNDTRACK?

Surprisingly, The Arcade Fire – makes fights feel like *Raging Bull* for 2006.

Q. THE BEST BOXING GAME YET?

Without question. A superb interactive experience.

ROCKY LEGENDS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 2

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

Xbox 360

OTHER

PS2, PSP, Xbox

ORIGIN

US

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER

In-House

PRICE

£49.99

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1-2

With every new console comes the weight of expectation; everyone involved with videogames clamours for something they've never seen before – an image, a moment that will define the upcoming generation. The Xbox 360's has finally arrived. No one will ever forget seeing *Fight Night Round 3*'s slow-motion 'knockout' replay for the first time. We mean it.

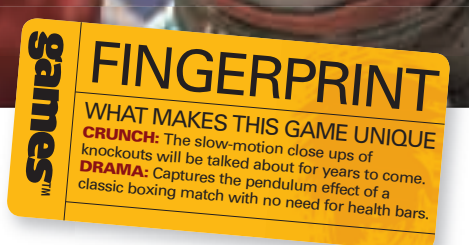
This is due almost entirely to the game's incredible visual treatment – surely the closest a videogame has come to the Holy Grail that is photo-realism – in terms of character design at least. *Fight Night* has always been applauded for its instantly recognisable boxing superstars, but with *Round 3* it's actually difficult to differentiate between the game screen and a photograph at times, specifically due to the complete absence of any HUD decals. When a critical blow hits and that slow-motion replay kicks in it's an incredible sight: a hideous contorting and twisting of facial features and rippling of skin as glove meets jaw. If *Fight Night Round 3* is the pornography of violence, then these are its money shots.

As tremendous as the graphics truly are, they would serve to be completely meaningless if Electronic Arts' now established Total Punch control system had failed to be included (freshly revamped and subtly enhanced, of course). Using the right stick to control every blow is as inspired as Tiger Woods' swing action, and the debut of 'impact punches' for this year's update has added yet another layer of depth to the already superb fighting engine. They are the equivalent of Ali's finishing blow in the legendary Rumble in the Jungle – one almighty punch that can change the tide of a match-up instantly. When they connect, another of *Fight Night Round 3*'s visual tricks kicks in: the camera pans round to reveal a scarily realistic first-person perspective with the aggressor throwing all manner of blows in an attempt to knock his doomed opponent out.

The game throws a great deal of audiovisual energy back at the player and the first couple of fights are so astonishing that it's really quite difficult not to be awestruck. Only once the magnitude of the graphics finally wears off and



■ Certain powerful hits will bring you face to face with your opponent in this painfully realistic first-person perspective.



you've noticed a couple of polygon glitches and angular spectators can you start staging bouts that will go down in history.

The parrying system is ingenious; the perfect blend of risk and reward, and the key to the dramatic twisty-turny bouts that make boxing such an enticing sport to watch. One well-timed parry of an incoming haymaker will open your opponent just long enough to deliver a hammer blow to their cranium, and turn the fight in your favour. Attempt the wrong type of parry, however, and you leave yourself open to all manner of pain.

The melodrama of a classic bout makes *Fight Night Round 3* an essential multiplayer title. A 12-round epic is an emotionally draining experience, and when it can all be settled on one punch, it can also be a wonderfully tense affair. The same could be said of its predecessor, though, and this is *Round 3*'s solitary downfall. It may well be beautiful to look at, but the fighting engine, although improved, is so similar to that of *Fight Night Round 2* that series veterans may feel somewhat aggrieved when faced with essentially the same videogame. Also, the animation, while skilled (especially in the capturing of boxers' specific styles and techniques) seems rather robotic when compared to the near flawless visuals. It jars somewhat, meaning that *Fight Night Round 3* still, at its core, looks like a game, and not a real boxing match.

Also, outside the multiplayer arena there is not a huge number of options for *Fight Nighters* to enjoy. The EPSN classics – beautifully presented classic match-ups from down the ages – are better when played with a human opponent, so it's left to the slightly lacklustre Career mode to satiate the solitary gamer's appetite for destruction. When compared to the drama of a *Smackdown* season mode, it feels a little bit sterile and rigid in structure. Thankfully, the actual fighting is almost infinitely better.

The combat is so much better, in fact, that the Career mode is relegated to second place by the theatre of *Fight Night*'s classic matches. Who needs enforced drama when the curtains are drawn on a 15-round slug-fest that Don King could only dream of? *Fight Night Round 3* is the definitive boxing experience. A brutal spectacle of blood, sweat and broken noses with a deep combat engine to appease the hardcore, and the type of visuals the 360 was born to produce. Nigh on essential.



BLOOD WILL TELL

Round 3's damage system is predictably superb, leaving boxers with faces so distorted, bruised and damaged that you wince just looking at them.

Round 2's between-round healing system has been refined, allowing for the icing and swabbing of specific parts of your fighter's face. The lack of HUD means that you must pay careful attention not only to the state of a boxer's face but to his body language and the pace of his blows, too. Clever fighters will exploit a weak point or cut, or use their tactical nouse to let an opponent punch himself out.



■ The knockdown mini-game is largely superfluous – if you're beaten too badly, you're not getting up.



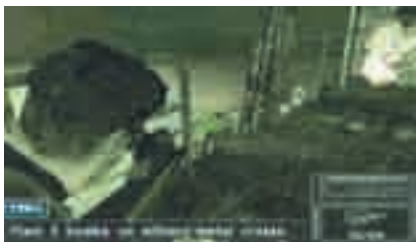
■ Climb into the ring with some of the biggest names in fighting history. No no, after you, sir.

VERDICT 8/10

GROTESQUELY BEAUTIFUL AND TREMENDOUS TO PLAY



■ Will Ubisoft's well-known stealth series push the boundaries of handheld console gaming, or just push its luck? Find out today.



■ If we had some crates, there's no way we'd let Mr Fisher anywhere near them.



■ Can you imagine trying to create a prison equipped enough to keep Sam Fisher locked up?

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL ESSENTIALS

FISHER MAKES THE COVERT TRANSITION TO SONY'S HANDHELD



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PSP

ORIGIN

USA

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DEVELOPER

In-House

PRICE

£34.99

RELEASE

31 March (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS

1-2

Sam Fisher hasn't had a particularly successful time on handheld consoles to date, with some dodgy N-Gage outings and a so-so

DS effort. As such, it's with trepidation that we approach *Essentials*, his first PSP venture.

Rather confusingly set before, during and after all the other games in the series, *Essentials* takes the form of a series of flashbacks starting off in the present day (the futuristic 2009 in the world of *Splinter Cell*) with Fisher visiting the grave of his dead daughter. While there, he is caught and arrested in connection with the death of Lambert and other events that are to take place in the now delayed *Double Agent*. We are then taken on a whirlwind tour of Sam's career, from his days as a SEAL in the early Nineties right up to the undercover shenanigans of *Double Agent*. While this may sound interesting, it simply leaves the game disjointed. Add to this the fact that some of the missions are taken from previous titles, and it's one big disappointment.

As with most games that benefit from the presence of two analogue sticks, the development team have had to rethink the controls. This leaves you unable to move the

character and the camera at the same time. No big deal, you may say, but in a game of this style where timing is everything, it's an important factor. Couple this with the fact that the scenery sometimes looks a little ropery and the camera glitches through much of it with alarming regularity, and the memories of high-end production values found in previous *Splinter Cell* games will be long gone.

Despite the disappointing camera, the game plays surprisingly well on the handheld machine, and fans of the series will be quite at home sneaking around in the dark with new sound meters to alert you of danger if you happen to be playing on a noisy bus. The added bonus of Wi-Fi Spy Versus Spy deathmatches is also an appealing addition.

With the delay of *Double Agent*, this will fill the gap briefly for those craving more Sam Fisher action, but it isn't the PSP debut we had hoped for. With a short lifespan and old missions, let's hope this isn't the beginning of the end for what has been a strong franchise.

VERDICT 6/10
A DISAPPOINTING PSP DEBUT

SPLINTER CELL (GBA)



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY (PS2)

PAL CONVERSIONS BITE BACK

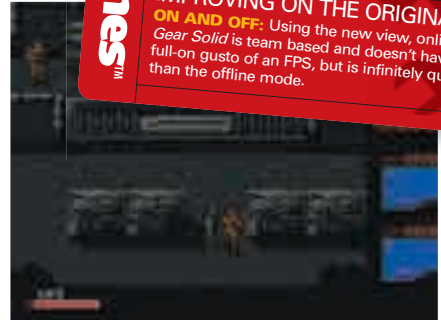
METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SUBSISTENCE



■ We just know an exclamation mark is going to appear any second.



■ What was that, Snake? Now, where did we put that translation guide?



■ Ah ha! Unlockable originals are always a joy to stumble upon.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PS2

ORIGIN

Japan

PUBLISHER

Konami

DEVELOPER

Kojima Productions

PRICE

¥7,700

RELEASE

30 June

(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS

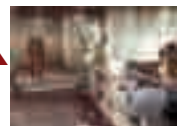
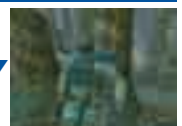
1 (2-8 Online)

The joy of importing. The joy of getting new games first, the joy of getting one over on those who wait for PAL conversions, the joy of being the ultimate capitalist whore. Except for now. Just this once, those importing from Japan will actually find their impatience has landed them on the wrong end of a raw deal.

Subsistence is made up of three different discs: Persistence containing Metal Gear Online; Existence featuring Kojima Studios' attempt to cobble together a film out of the in-game engine; and Subsistence which includes a tweaked *Sneak Eater*. Persistence is out of the picture until a PAL conversion, so the main interest here is Existence. The film seems to rely on voice overs to mask those clumsy transitions between cut-scenes, so the effect of a fluid film is largely lost while the boss battles, reconstructed

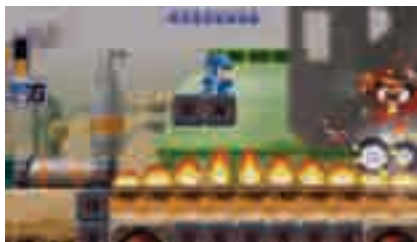
using the in-game engine to compensate for the lack of cut-scenes, are stilted and awkward. An interesting experiment but one that struggles to survive without the slow pacing of *Sneak Eater* itself. Other trimmings include the original *Metal Gear* games, which have inevitably dated badly but remain interesting curios for fans of the series. In particular, it's interesting to cue up the start of *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* against *Metal Gear Solid*. Interesting enough to justify full price? Probably not, which is why new Snake vs Monkey missions have been added. They can justify almost anything.

Which leaves the main venture itself. *Sneak Eater* is still a triumph of design that rewards patience through slow-burning gameplay that neither frustrates nor alienates once the steep learning curve has finally been conquered. However, while *Sneak Eater's* strengths are passed down to *Subsistence*, it seems that the younger brother has very little new to offer. European Extreme mode isn't new to Europeans, neither is Demo Theater and most of the new camouflages have already been seen by those with PlayStation2 units hooked up to broadband. The new third-person camera is a cute and interesting addition, but hardly one to warrant the full-price tag draped around *Subsistence's* neck. So until it undergoes the PAL conversion with a full translation and fully operational Online mode, this will be one of those rare occasions for importers to hold fire and sit with the thumb-twiddling PAL crowd.


METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY

BETTER THAN
WORSE THAN

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER
VERDICT 6/10
WAIT FOR THE PAL CONVERSION



■ Stealing is bad. Really bad. That is unless you're stealing oil slick abilities from the evil Oil Man, of course, then it's okay.



■ This new 'cute' look suits the *Mega Man* characters really well. Don't be deceived, though, it's still hard as nails to get through.



■ The bosses have also been given an overhaul. Somehow, Capcom even managed to make Cut Man look quite impressive.

MEGA MAN: POWERED UP

THE LITTLE GUY'S LOOKING ALL GROWN UP



DETAILS	
PS2	PS3
Wii	Xbox 360
PC	PS4
Switch	PS5
FORMAT REVIEWED	
PSP	
ORIGIN	
Japan	
PUBLISHER	
Capcom	
DEVELOPER	
In-House	
PRICE	
£29.99	
RELEASE	
24 March	
PLAYERS	
1	

Mega Man has certainly done the rounds over the years, but few can claim that any recent offerings have bettered the early attempts that succeeded in creating a videogame icon.

The first *Mega Man* game was tough. Very tough. So tough, in fact, that many were left crying as Cut Man managed to drain their life bar for the eighth time that day. We loved it. Of course, adding to this love was the fact that, although difficult, with enough practice it was possible to master the game and complete every area without taking a hit.

Powered Up is this same game, but moving a classic title onto the PSP is far more difficult than you'd expect. With new technology comes the expectation to deliver new experiences; simple ports rarely do the job. Fortunately, this is something Capcom has realised and prepared for.

This edition treats you to all the wonder of the original *Mega Man* but with spruced up character and level designs. The new 'cute' look suits the title, but the real treat is the stage layout. When you begin play, you're given the choice of which game style you want to proceed with. The New Style option sees you traversing tweaked levels that complement

the visuals, while Old Style gives you the classic feel with wide, open areas and smaller characters. Both offer the same challenge, but it's a good way to please newcomers as well as those who have grown up with the little chap.

Also enhancing the package are the extra features. As well as the chance to replay the game as any of the beaten bosses (Oil Man is probably the best thing in existence), the self-explanatory Mega Man Challenge 100 mode provides you with enough bonus missions to keep you playing long after you conquer the main game. Arguably the best new feature is the level creation tool. By collecting items in the main game, you can unlock different level sets with which you can piece together your own impossibly hard stages to share with the rest of the PSP community.

On the whole, most will already have seen what this particular version of *Mega Man* has to offer, however, there's still certainly enough here to warrant a purchase if you're craving some quality platform action for your little Sony friend.

VERDICT 7/10
AS GOOD AS IT EVER WAS







■ Sure, we all have a 360 now, but with visuals like these still being squeezed from the humble PlayStation2, we're happy to put the next gen on hold.



■ Girls and guns. It's all so very clichéd, but still it manages to lure us in – every time.



■ Puzzles in the games are far from taxing – except for those bloody puzzle boxes, of course.

ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS

IT COULD BE A DREAM COME TRUE

DETAILS	
	PlayStation2
	ORIGIN
	Japan
	PUBLISHER
	Capcom
	DEVELOPER
	In-House
	PRICE
	£39.99
	RELEASE
	Out Now
	PLAYERS
	1-2

Gaming can very easily cause your digits to suffer, especially when it comes to the beat-'em-up/action genre. Games have evolved to a level that sees them becoming as punishing and as strenuous as a mild session at the gym, and when it comes to slaying masses of enemies with a huge range of attacks – each initiated by one of many stick/button combinations – there's a chance you could do yourself an injury and cause your thumb dexterity to falter just enough to force you into repeating many a mission. However, we do endure this pain for a reason: there is a certain satisfaction to be reaped from the successful completion of an adequate combo, and mastering a combat system in its entirety sometimes feels on a par with learning something as grand as a language to those heavily involved – laughable maybe, but true enough.

Perhaps this is the reason the three previous ☐ *Onimusha* titles enjoyed such success. If there's one thing Capcom has proved it can achieve spectacularly, it's an impressive – not to mention intricate – combat system, and *Onimusha* games have always lent themselves to having the

boundaries associated with the genre pushed. Of course, this has often alienated those not wishing to commit the necessary time to the title; but is something that *Dawn Of Dreams* has managed to amend.

Appealing to those outside the traditional ☐ target audience is something that most developers are looking at in one form or another at the moment, as it's 'the future' apparently. The worry is that franchises that have made their way into our hearts in the past will be dumbed down to cater for the 'party game' generation, but Capcom provides hope once again by presenting an accessible title that is sure to appeal to all gamers. At key points, the Test Of Valour challenges judge your skill level and reward adequately; even the more difficult puzzles can be overcome with the use of currency rather than skill should a player find themselves lacking. The task of levelling up – famously a chore for those more interested in running through doors rather than dying at the hands of a particularly tough enemy – can be handled by extra exploration and the combination of items found along the way. The fact that all this has been implemented

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG ARE WE TALKING?

Even the developers have only managed 12 hours. You're probably talking at least 16.

Q. BUT I'M REALLY GOOD

Yeah, we thought that too, but it still takes about 16 hours.

Q. ANY DECENT UNLOCKABLES ON OFFER?

Street Fighter costumes. Nuff said.

games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

JOIN THE PARTY: Five differently attributed fighters allow you to really mix things up.

BUILD ME UP: More character customisation options than in any other *Onimusha* title.



■ Even the biggest, strongest, most armour-plated foe is no match for the power of the Oni.

without affecting the way in which *Onimusha* veterans play is genius on the part of Capcom.

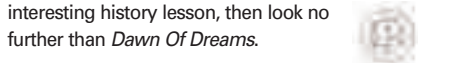
The other key difference is the fact that there are five playable characters. Previously the maximum has been a lowly two, so this is quite a shake up for the franchise, and the fact that you can switch between the two characters you choose to take into a stage at any time means that a wealth of new combat options have become available. Each character has its own advantages and attributes that can lend a hand in certain situations. Choosing between a monk that can talk to departed souls, a fist-fighter that can move large blocks and punch through doors, a range attack-enhanced gunslinger, and a small and nimble ninja make for a difficult choice when you're starting out on an adventure that's likely to require all skill sets at some point, but even this adds to the appeal of the title. As you progress you'll constantly encounter unreachable areas due to not having the right party member with you. While annoying at first, by the time completion comes around, you'll be pleased to



■ Don't know about you, but we're pretty sure they didn't have laser technology in ancient Japan.

wander back and pick up all the treasures that you missed the first time round – the special character outfits are worth the time alone.

With the classic *Onimusha* formula being enhanced in so many ways and the whole package being aimed at both the casual and hardcore players at the same time, there's little not to like about *Dawn Of Dreams*. True, some of the bosses take a horrendously long time to defeat, but that's always been the *Onimusha* way and, to be honest, we're glad of the challenge. Also, if you refuse to take the time to learn some of the more impressive moves and combos then you'll be met with little more than a lesson in hitting an attack button lots, but if you're after a fair few hours of well-presented violence combined with a vague and surprisingly interesting history lesson, then look no further than *Dawn Of Dreams*.



VERDICT 8/10
THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

MOVE YOUR BODY

Honing your skills certainly has its rewards. If you manage to get your characters up to a decent level, the combat combinations that become available are near limitless. Ploughing into a hefty foe with a regular combo, throwing in a few link moves, then hurling them into the air with a lifting hit will provide the opportunity to switch to your second character and catch the enemy on the way down with a whole new combo – simply rinse and repeat.



■ If there are more than five enemies on the screen, you can probably justify an awesome co-op attack. Boo-ya.

ONIMUSHA 3

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

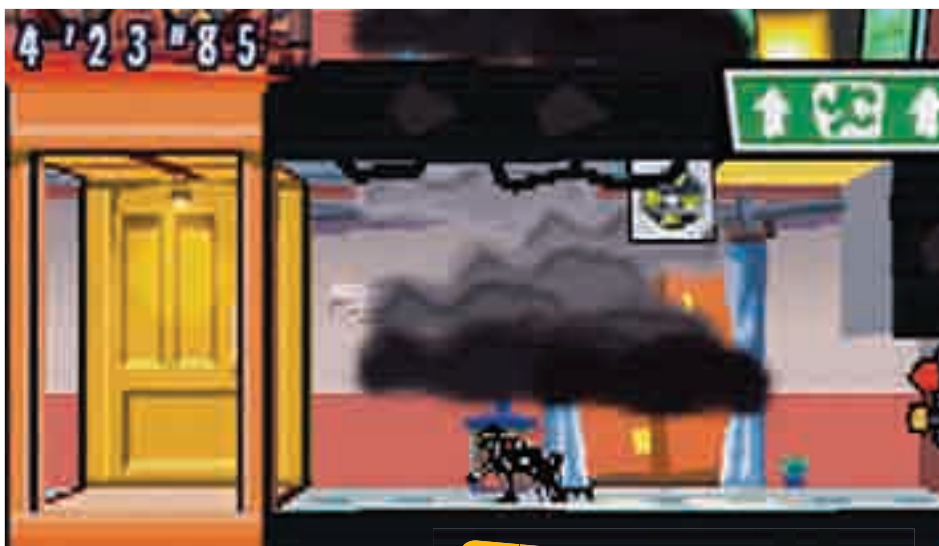
DEVIL MAY CRY 3



■ You'll need to find various items, but you can only use one at a time. Open the wrong door with that key and it's back to the start.



■ Rescuing kids (or in this case, getting them to find pickaxes and hack themselves out from behind a wall of ice) features heavily in *Exit*.



■ Ooh, nice and smokey. Such hazards as water, smoke and fire have wide ranging adverse effects on you and the other escapees.

DETAILS	
	FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP	
	ORIGIN
Japan	
	PUBLISHER
Ubisoft	
	DEVELOPER
Taito	
	PRICE
£34.99	
	RELEASE
Out Now	
	PLAYERS
1	

EXIT

"I REALLY NEED A SHOWER..."

Puzzle games tend to work well on the PSP. The console's pleasant aesthetics make puzzle solving a little easier on the eyes and ears and its portable nature suits the genre well, although playing too much *Exit* in one sitting is likely to give you a serious headache. Played as intended, though – in short, brain-intensive bursts – this is a very challenging and inventive PSP title, worthy of attention.

Distinctive and colourful, it's the game's visual style that immediately distinguishes it. The feel is strikingly retro pop art, with mannequin characters and 2D scenarios that look like cardboard collages. Gameplay-wise, *Exit* reminds us a little of *Lemmings*, although it's also quite like *Skool Daze* in level layout. Each scenario places the protagonist, a heroic escape artist, in a different dangerous building: the aim is to both escape intact and rescue anyone else trapped inside. In all, there are over 90 separate puzzles, ranging from simple escape acts to complex, 15-minute-long rescue operations. Although the protagonist himself can get around fairly easily, the overweight, injured or very young people trapped inside the buildings tend to need a considerable degree of looking after, requiring careful forethought and co-operation on the part of the player in order to clear each scenario.

The escape artist can order escapees to help with lifting injured friends or hoisting

each other over obstacles via a point-and-click system, and although the AI sometimes has problems understanding what you want your charges to do, the system tends to work well. Unfortunately, the trapped individuals' constant moaning, irritating soundbites, and apparent obsession with needing showers quickly annoy the ears, meaning that you're likely to want to turn the sound off and work in silence instead.

The puzzles themselves are well thought through and generally satisfying to solve, but the escape artist's slow movement and cumbersome controls make them more frustrating than they should. Actually executing the actions to clear a scenario is usually far more difficult than working out how to solve it, and due to the levels' sequential nature, a single wrongly placed block, or oversight will often mean starting over. However, such frustrations tend to be an integral part of the puzzle genre. By playing just one or two games at a time, *Exit* feels well paced and provides pleasant brain exercise without becoming frustrating. As a portable title, it certainly does everything required of it, and a visually exciting style adds considerably to its overall appeal.



VERDICT 7/10

NOVEL, CHALLENGING, BUT SLIGHTLY CUMBERSOME



FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS

IT'S HAMMER TIME



DETAILS
FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
OTHER FORMATS
PS2, PC
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
THQ
DEVELOPER
Pandemic
PRICE
£34.99
RELEASE
31 March (US: Out Now)
PLAYERS
1 (1-2 Online)

It's a shame that *Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers* should arrive in the office the very same week as *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*.

Although the two are quite different games, looking at them side by side makes *Ten Hammers'* squad-based portrayal of warfare look distinctly last generation. However, the game still has a lot to offer – its improvements upon the last *Full Spectrum Warrior* are notable and the series is still unique in its mentally challenging, strategic gameplay mechanic. *Full Spectrum Warrior* is more like military chess than the all-action, heart-in-mouth, first-person version of war found in *Call Of Duty* and other such games, though it certainly doesn't lack excitement.

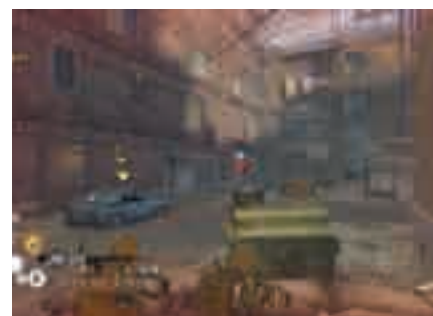
Ten Hammers feels more engaging than its predecessor from the off. For one thing, it's more freeform; the environments actually feel like warzones rather than the obstacle courses of the first game, and the scope for different tactics is much greater. Although the game has an irritating habit of telling you what to do in certain situations,

thereby ruining the satisfaction of discovering a building to snipe from or other tactical coup, you feel far more in control of your soldiers and the feeling of danger and caution is therefore far more pronounced.

The controls also feel far more direct than before, which also helps to involve the player in the scenarios to a greater degree. Your two separate four-man squads can be split into two-man buddy teams and controlled remotely – to an extent. This makes flanking and other such manoeuvres flow more naturally and means your team isn't stuck behind cover, wasting ammo on a stalemate for minutes at a stretch while you move your other squad into position. Also new to *Ten Hammers* is a useful radar in the bottom corner, which shows the terrain where your cursor lies; this takes away the guesswork that used to be involved in ordering your troops around obstacles. However, despite these considerable improvements, the controls still let the game down on occasion. Soldiers often pick ridiculous routes to their destinations, deciding to



■ Corners offer near invincibility. Crates, however, don't – they fall to bits when shot at. Judging whether or not scenery is destructible is key.



■ Exposing your troops to fire is, demonstrably, very dangerous – but keeping them constantly hidden behind cover means they can't attack.



■ Running across open ground is very, very bad. Silly soldier.



run straight out into the open rather than staying behind a wall – you have to practically hold their hands every step of the way in order to get them where they want to go via a sensible, non-lethal route. If a soldier is injured, for example, it would be nice to be able to simply order someone to take him to an evacuation point rather than having to guide them all the way back through a safe zone. Essentially, though, controlling soldiers remotely as you do in *Full Spectrum Warrior* is always going to be problematic to an extent – *Ten Hammers* does as good a job with the controls as it could possibly be expected to with an Xbox controller.

The way that the controls work actually makes it easier to go through the game with just one team rather than trying to co-ordinate both. Although you can, for instance, order Alpha to a destination without switching away from Bravo, the remote controls are limited and it can be a better idea to split one team into two and use the new direct-control firing function (see Direct Control) to make things easier. It doesn't help that teams left on their own are often ambushed and are too stupid to take cover or retaliate without you ordering them to do so.

Ten Hammers' greatest strength is arguably its realistic setting. The battlefield is Iraq in all but name – as before – and it provides excellent warfare environments full of tactical opportunities. The realism of its setting also makes the game's story considerably more affecting; although soldiers' individual personalities aren't developed greatly (such

development is far better-suited to first-person, non-remote war games), the worrying familiarity of the setting makes it all too easy to imagine the scenarios taking place in real life with actual soldiers.

Although *Ten Hammers* isn't quite as perfect as it might have been, its tense and realistic portrayal of warfare is commendable and it remains a very entertaining and, on occasion, exceptionally rewarding game. Even if it takes ten tries, the perfectly executed strategic manoeuvre is as satisfying as in any strategy game, and the unique mix of real-time strategy and third-person action is engaging and, ultimately, very effective. Had the original *Full Spectrum Warrior* been as good as this, it would doubtless have been heralded as a groundbreaking classic of a war game – sadly, *Ten Hammers* has arrived a year or two too late to deserve such an accolade. It still deserves to be played, however, as *Ten Hammers* is a cerebral and unusual war game with issues that don't, in the end, detract from its effectiveness.

DIRECT CONTROL

Perhaps the most significant addition to *FSW* is the direct control element that allows you to take direct shots with your units. Grenadiers can launch explosives, riflemen can pick off specific opponents, and team leaders can use laser precision to call in air strikes or other support. This makes the game easier as troublesome enemies can be picked off with a single shot. Go into direct control without adequate cover, though, and you'll be dead within seconds. The direct control elements do add to the tactical options; splitting your team in two and sending a rifleman to snipe while using other team members on the ground, for instance, cuts out a lot of frustration trying to get troops into position on the ground.



FAQs

Q. SO WHAT'S NEW?

Lots. *Ten Hammers* actually feels like a videogame rather than a military exercise programme – there's a lot more excitement.

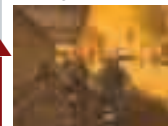
Q. SUCH AS?

Direct control is new, the game's a bit longer (12 missions), and the story's better.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE MULTI-PLAYER?

As with the first game, you can fight against a friend's squad online. Split screen doesn't work well, though.

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GHOST RECON:
ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

VERDICT **7/10**

COMMENDABLE AND STILL UNIQUE, IF A LITTLE CLUMSY

WHEN GOOD FRANCHISES GO BAD

COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

DETAILS

PS2 PS3 Xbox

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
Spain

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Pyro Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (1-8 Online)

The second an established franchise takes a radical new direction, as *Commandos* has done with its switch from isometric tactical stealth to first-person shooter, if it turns out to be anything less than stellar then expect a backlash. Unfortunately for Eidos, *Commandos Strike Force* is something less than stellar. And by quite some way, too.

As far as opening levels go, *Strike Force* ranks highly among the worst ever conceived. Dull, trite and ugly as sin, it's a training level disguised as a rescue mission that wouldn't look out of place in a PSOne game. Not a way to win over the concerned fans.

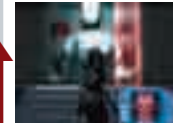
After the misery of this ill-conceived curtain raiser, *Commandos* does settle into its stride somewhat. As with the older games, you are in charge of a three-man squad – Sniper, Green Beret and Spy (who bears more than a passing resemblance to Steve McQueen) – and the WWII-based missions are conquered with tactical swapping between soldiers. For example, use the Green Beret to hold a position on a bridge, then swap to the sniper to pick off the German reinforcements, or sneak into a Nazi compound as the Spy then charge in after him with the Green Beret to catch the opposition unawares. When it works it's entertaining – control is solid and the ragdoll animation of the enemies leads to some amusing deaths, but the game is so immensely frustrating and linear that moments of fun are few and far between.



For a stealthy shooter to be enjoyable it simply has to offer the player choice. *Deus Ex*, *Splinter Cell*, *Metal Gear*, *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath*... all let the player approach any situation as they see fit, and the results are infinitely more satisfying when you yourself have made the correct decisions. *Commandos'* approach to stealth, however, is to force the player to follow the game's own pre-determined method through a level, and with pitiful signposting, ridiculous stealth parameters (where you can be detected by no one while in an empty room) and the aforementioned abominable graphics (the last time we saw a tree look like that was in the first *Driver* game), *Strike Force* proves an almost entirely unnecessary addition to the already overcrowded World War II videogame market.

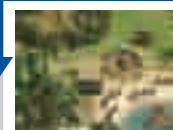
■ Everyone was depressed when Alf admitted he'd forgotten to bring the parachutes but that they'd have to jump anyway.

STOLEN



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



COMMANDOS

VERDICT 4/10

A LETDOWN THAT TARNISHES THE GOOD NAME.



■ It's linearity that brings *Commandos Strike Force* right down to the level of bad, bad game.

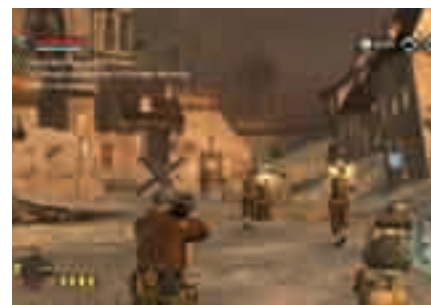




■ Why resort to shooting your enemy with bullets when you can whip out your flame-thrower and toast the Krauts in one swift high-temperature movement – just don't use it against anything (or anyone) too close to you, otherwise you'll feel a little hot under the collar yourself.



■ Vehicles are your best friend. Order one up, jump in, get some of your mates to join you and set off for a Nazi-killing drive-by.



■ Some of the settings can be quite nice on the eye, but still you always feel as though you're in a confined area.

DETAILS	
	FORMAT REVIEWED
	Xbox 360
	ORIGIN
	Canada
	PUBLISHER
	THQ
	DEVELOPER
	Relic Entertainment
	PRICE
	£49.99
	RELEASE
	Out Now
	PLAYERS
	1-2 (2-4 Online)

HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB

THE OUTFIT

The Xbox 360's status as a 'next-gen console' has taken a few knocks since its stalled release last year, with only a handful of launch titles – spluttering out of various studios – to justify the supposed leap in technology. There have been few games that actually look next gen, let alone implement and utilise the capabilities of the console. Although the first WWII-based shoot-'em-up, *Call Of Duty 2*, impressed both visually and technically – also making full use of the HD revolution – *The Outfit* feels more like an Xbox port. To say that it was developed for the 360 specifically, will only fuel the cynics and discourage potential buyers who are yet to be tipped into the golden age of HD gaming.

Relic has seemingly designed *The Outfit* as an alternative in the ever-growing popularity of the squad-based combat arena by simplifying the gameplay and skills required to play and enjoy it. While strategic elements are still involved – such as ordering your troops to suppress fire, assault, or a third option that's exclusive to the squad commander (ie, assault a tank) – it feels less Sun Tzu's *The Art Of War* and more Wesley Snipes' dire action flick of the same name.

Arguably, its unique selling point is that it allow gamers of any standard to dip in and out without any real disadvantage to the player. However, the downside of this presents repetition as you proceed from one objective to another – usually a case of capturing a motor pool, a farm, a part of town, another motor pool... yawn – all the while finding yourself employing the same tactics of calling in a tank, then shooting, blasting and running over the enemy. Though it has to be said, be it *Halo 2* or *The Outfit*, mowing the enemy down repeatedly in all manner of assault transport never becomes tiresome. Really, it doesn't.

There are numerous strongholds throughout the linear-objective maps that, once taken forcibly from the Nazi War Machine – securing strongholds such as armouries and motor pools gives access to weapons and vehicles within the Destruction On Demand menu – allow spawn points should your brave squadron leader bite the high-velocity bullet. Each time you die, you're given the option to respawn with one of three squad leaders, rejoin the fight and then continue with the cartoonish assault against the 12 levels of Nazi occupation.

FAQs

Q. MORE WAR?

Yes, apparently it helps to sell videogames, make movies and mock the enemy.

Q. WHY THE VOICE TALENT?

Putting movie stars in your game helps to sell copies, especially if it's a bit average.

Q. BUT I'M JUST A CASUAL GAMER?

Then you'll probably enjoy it a lot more than a seasoned veteran of war games.

BEING IN WWII



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BATTLEFIELD 2



■ Why use the flame-thrower when a heavy bazooka is to hand? Now this is what we're talking about – badda badda boom!



What the 360 does bring to the table is the ☐ capability to allow games to fully exploit interactive and destructible environments, and *The Outfit* does just that – with gratifying results. Using any of the aforementioned weapons, or by utilising the arsenal within the appropriately titled Destruction On Demand menu which we'll touch on in a minute, you can blow up buildings, destroy bridges, smash through walls and trees – pretty much anything that inhabits the inner layer of the landscapes. This is arguably a saving grace in an otherwise average experience.

So, back to that unique Destruction On ☐ Demand menu. It's based on an action point system whereby you earn money for completing objectives, killing Krauts and generally blowing shit up. This system is your link to superior firepower by way of a crate drop, be it in the form of reinforcements, a tank, an air strike or numerous artillery and vehicle options. Initially, you're advised on which weapons to call in and where to place them, but before long you'll be bringing a world of pain down on the German occupation. Playing *The Outfit* strategically does bring a quicker conclusion to the war effort, but it's just as easy – and sometimes more entertaining – to 'Demand' a tank and set about using the machine gun and rockets to unleash your fury upon the enemy.

The multiplayer aspect, which has become ☐ a major selling point on the 360, is disappointingly average. In Split-Screen mode

you can either fight against a friend in a straight-up deathmatch – as well as in the various other modes – or work together in Co-Op over the same missions in single-player. This is mildly amusing to begin with but quickly becomes uninteresting, especially when there are so many other, better multi-player games on which to spend your time.

While combat FPS and third-person shoot-☐ 'em-ups become increasingly complex as technology progresses, *The Outfit*, for better or worse (but more so the latter), is akin to Microsoft's Xbox 360 launch stocks – disappointing. Firing in the opposite direction of the seasoned gamer, *The Outfit* will only appeal to causal gamers who prefer to smash and grab their way through levels rather than apply strategy.



YOU MAY REMEMBER HIM FROM...

The Outfit's voice talent gives it a stylish movie feel. Three squad commanders bring Hollywood names: Hellboy himself, Ron Perlman, voices the grease gun and flamethrower-carrying bad ass Tommy Mac; *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*'s liquid metal menace Robert Patrick is the heavy bazooka and pistol-equipped Deuce Williams; while videogame voiceover veteran and bit-part movie actor TC Carlson is the rifle and shotgun sarge JD Tyler.



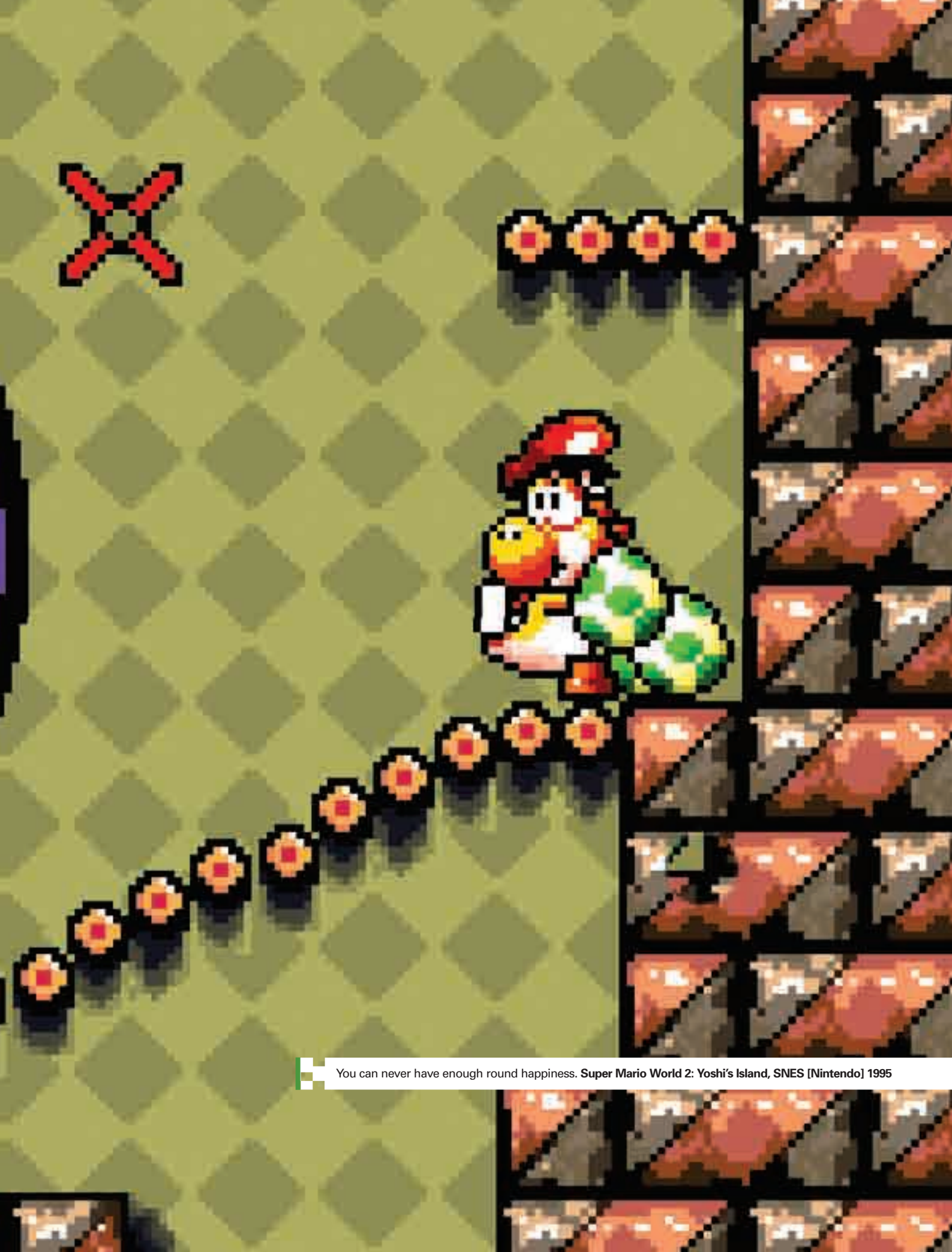
■ Cut-scenes between missions continue the comic book-esque story and often provide more amusement than the missions themselves.



■ Call in reinforcements at the drop of a hat and the expense of some credits by using the Destruction On Demand menu.

VERDICT 5/10
DECIDEDLY AVERAGE





You can never have enough round happiness. **Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island**, SNES [Nintendo] 1995



RETRO

MICRO GAMES ACTION

AN IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.42 MAR 2006

00p

GROOVY!

WE REMEMBER
EARTHWORM JIM

ALONE IN THE DARK

Trevor Storey talks
Total Eclipse

SILENT BOMBER

We demand a
remake!

PLUS

RETRO NEWS,
WHY DON'T
THEY REMAKE,
BUYERS' GUIDE,
RETRO BOOK REVIEWS,
GAMES TIME FORGOT
AND MUCH MORE...

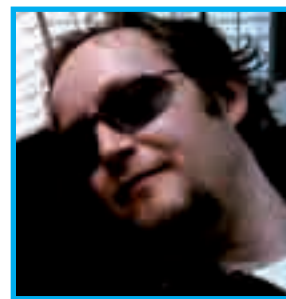
THE TOP 50 RETRO GAMES

The wait is finally over – what grabbed
the number one spot?

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

**Darren Jones,
Editor – Retro Gamer**

TOTALLY ECLIPSED



▲ Trevor tells us a story about *Total Eclipse*

▲ 'Spankingly good' is how Storey wanted it to look.

A screenshot from the game 'The Curse of the Pharaohs'. The scene depicts an ancient Egyptian temple interior. On the left, a large statue of a pharaoh stands in a niche. In the center, a smaller statue is positioned in front of a wall featuring a large, stylized eye hieroglyph. To the right, another statue is visible. The top of the screen displays the game's title 'THE CURSE OF THE PHAROHS' in a stylized font, along with a score of '500065000' and the text 'NORAKHTY-F'. The bottom of the screen shows a user interface with a clock, a heart icon, a blue bar, and a moon icon.

132 ■ GAMES ■ RETRO

by David Leafe

R.O. NEWS R.E.T.R.O. NEWS

had charm in abundance, and in who, caring little for parenthood, en

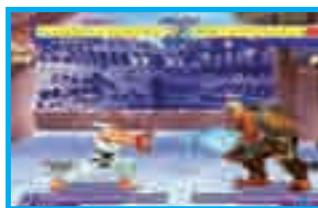
KING OF THE FIGHTERS

CAPCOM AIMS FOR ALPHA DOMINANCE

Capcom has given retro fans plenty of love recently. An excellent *Darkstalkers* anthology appeared on PS2 in Japan, *Street Fighter Alpha Max* has recently arrived on PSP, and then there was the fantastic *Capcom Classic Collection* that launched back in November. Realising that there's money to be made from this retro lark, Capcom's announcing a new *Street Fighter* compilation that's bound to have fans dribbling like slack-jawed yokels.

Street Fighter Alpha Anthology is a new collection of arcade hits appearing in the US (and hopefully the UK) this year. *SFA*, *SFA2*, *SFA2 Gold* and *SFA3* will be joined by the excellent Super Gem Fighter Mini-Mix (aka *Pocket Fighters*). All five titles have been out on previous home systems, but this is the first time you can buy them in one pack.

The four *Street Fighter Alpha* titles will also feature a variety of



▲ Ryu: the ultimate street fighting man.

play modes to ensure that you get as much value for money from your compilation as possible. As well as the expected Arcade, Training and Versus modes, you'll also be able to take part in gruelling survival bouts and an ace Dramatic Battle mode that enables two-on-one tag-team matches.

Interestingly, no Online mode has yet been announced by Capcom, and we've not heard if the new anthology will appear on any other machines. Still, it's surely only a matter of time before Capcom reveals something a little more concrete. Until then, we'll just have to get back to playing *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*.

WILL THE REAL PONG CREATOR PLEASE STAND?

BAER HONOURED AT THE WHITE HOUSE

Two years ago, German-born American inventor Ralph Baer was awarded the National Medal Of Technology for his work in developing and commercialising videogames. George Bush finally presented Baer with his medal on 13 February this year. This coveted prize is awarded to individuals who 'embody the spirit of American innovation and who have advanced the nation's global competitiveness'.

Often in the shadow of Atari founder Nolan Bushnell, Baer

is most famous for creating the retro masterpiece we now know as *Pong*. He went on to licence out his technology to the likes of Atari, effectively kick-starting the whole videogame industry revolution. Well done, Ralph. We salute you.



Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming becomes increasingly popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro releases and events...

MARCH '06

Under Defeat

Date: 23 March **Publisher:** G-Rev **Price:** £34.95 **Format:** Dreamcast
Sega's 132-bit wonder machine refuses to die, as G-Rev's excellent shoot-'em-up *Under Defeat* marks the second Dreamcast game to be released in as many months (*Radilgy* was released in February). *Under Defeat* features similar play mechanics to Psikyo's *Zero Gunner 2* and is another frantic shoot-'em-up from the maker of the outstanding (and underrated) *Border Down*. Head to www.play-asia.com and order it.

Taito Legends 2

Date: 31 March **Publisher:** Xplosiv **Price:** £TBA **Format:** GBA
We've been fortunate enough to play it to death (see our review on page 134), and now it's your turn to sample the delights of this compilation. *Elevator Action Returns*, *Puzzle Bubble 2* and *Don Doko Don* are highlights, but there are so many more hidden gems.

APRIL '06

Sensible Soccer

Date: 07 April **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP
In our heart of hearts we can't help but wonder if Codemasters would have been better off sticking with the original Amiga hit and releasing it on Xbox Live Arcade. Still, despite the strange look of the players and the fact that nothing has been able to touch *Pro Evolution* for years, we're sure that Mr Hare is going to have a few tricks up his sleeves.

Rampage: Total Destruction

Date: 07 April **Publisher:** Midway **Price:** £39.99 **Format:** PS2, Xbox
Don't tell anyone we said this, but the original *Rampage* wasn't that good. Granted, the first few levels were fun and featured some comical visuals, but it soon became mind-numbingly boring. Still, there's always the chance that this update will sidestep the problems of the original and deliver something new. Here's hoping, eh?

TO BE CONFIRMED '06

Extreme Ghosts 'N' Goblins

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP
We're not sure if this is such a good idea for a remake, to be honest. *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* was ridiculously hard in its original form, so we can't imagine things being any different this time around. Surely that's going to result in more than a few broken PSPs before the day is out?

Capcom Classics Collection Remixed

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBA **Format:** PSP
We finally have details on this long-awaited PSP compilation of arcade brilliance. No less than 20 retro favorites have been squeezed in, some with the bonus of wireless multi-player! Included are some beauties: *1941*, *Magic Sword*, *Street Fighter*, and *Strider*. Scheduled for release in March in the US, we're through waiting for this classic anthology.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the magazine at gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk.

T•A•I•T•O L•E•G•E•N•D•S•2



Well, it seems to have taken an age, but Xplosiv's follow-up to its superb *Taito Legends* compilation is finally with us, and by golly it's good. Unlike the first compendium that featured plenty of well-known classics from the early Eighties, the games that make up the bulk of this second offering

aren't quite as familiar – mainly because many were exclusive to Japan. Don't let that put you off; there are some really solid games on offer that many PAL owners will probably not have had access to. *Elevator Action Returns*, *Cleopatra Fortune*, *Don Doko Don*, *Gun Frontier*, *Bubble Symphony* and

Liquid Kids are just a few of the great titles on offer, and while there aren't as many options as we'd like, there's no denying that *Taito Legends 2* represents excellent value for money. Don't believe us? Then take a look at some of the games we couldn't put down...

THE LEGENDS OF TAITO RETURN IN ANOTHER ACTION-PACKED COMPILATION CLASSIC...

FORMAT REVIEWED: Xbox (Also on: PC and PS2) PRICE: £19.99 PLAYERS: 1-4 PUBLISHER: Xplosiv

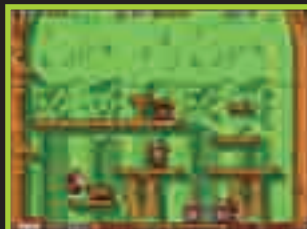
ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS

Quite possibly the greatest game on *Taito Legends 2*, this is worth the asking price alone, especially as the Saturn version sells for over £40 nowadays. Like the original, the aim of *Returns* is simple: make your way through each building by diffusing the bombs hidden behind the red doors. Granted, gameplay is simple, but it's instantly accessible and a joy to play. Fabulous visuals, wonderfully animated sprites (yes, sprites) and a healthy dose of ultra-violence combine to create an intense shooter that'll keep you going for an age.



DON DOKO DON

This great little platformer was only previously available on the PC Engine and NES, so it's great to see that it can now be enjoyed by a new generation of gamers. Like *Bubble Symphony* and *The Fairyland Story*, all the action in *Don Doko Don* takes place on a single screen, but instead of blowing bubbles or throwing cakes at opponents, your weapon of choice is a handy hammer. Once an enemy has been hammered into submission, you can throw him at another opponent. Clear the screen, and you can move on. Cute visuals and a chirpy soundtrack round off a delightful little game.



BUBBLE SYMPHONY

Like many titles on *Taito Legends 2*, *Bubble Symphony* never received a UK release on any system – a damned shame as it's a highlight of this outstanding compilation. Take the original *Bubble Bobble*, throw in two extra dinosaurs, new level designs and some greatly enhanced visuals, and you have *Bubble Symphony* in a nutshell. Play focuses around various musical themes, and like *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands* before it, there's a ton of secrets to uncover. Add in plenty of new bubble abilities and the option to charge up your dinos, and you have another classic platformer that shouldn't be missed.



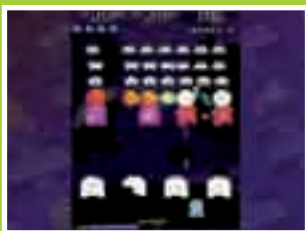
LIQUID KIDS

Taito is the master of the cute platformer and the superb *Liquid Kids* is no exception. Previously out on both the PC Engine and Sega Saturn, it sees you taking control of a typically cute beastie who uses water bombs to freeze and then kill his many opponents. Unlike a lot of the other platformers on *Legends 2*, your hero (who looks like a cross between a platypus and Kirby) isn't confined to one screen and has a selection of colourfully drawn locations to wander through. Think *The New Zealand Story* crossed with *Bubble Bobble* and you can't go wrong. Another excellent little platformer.



SPACE INVADERS 95

Considering *Space Invaders* effectively kick-started Taito, it's unsurprising that three games from the series feature here. If we're brutally honest – barring the hilarious parody featured in *Space Invaders DS* – the only title worth returning to is *Space Invaders 95*. It's a wacky twist on the classic, yet spices it up with great power-ups, quirky visuals and fantastic tunes. We may not enjoy the original any more, but there's something charming about this shooter that makes it impossible to put down. Thank god you can save all your high scores; we've been playing this for hours.



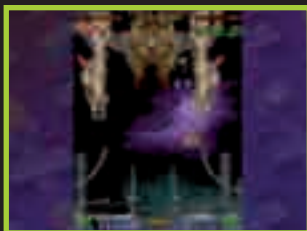
PUCHI CARET

It's amazing to think that we're nearly 70 games into Taito's back catalogue and still haven't received a version of *Arkanoid* yet. Never mind, at least there's the cutesy *Puchi Caret* to fill the void. Playing like a bizarre cross between *Puzzle Bobble 2* (which is also included on the compilation) and *Arkanoid*, *Puchi Caret* sees you using your ball to take down a wall of gems. Let the ball slip past your bat, and the gems will get increasingly closer to you until a life is inevitably lost. It takes a while to get used to the sensitive controls, but once you do you'll become horribly hooked on this wonderfully quirky little puzzler.



RAYFORCE

With so many outstanding shooters available on the Saturn, the superb *Rayforce* (aka *Galactic Attack* in the UK) often finds itself overlooked. Fortunately, it's easily the best shooter on the Xbox version of *Taito Legends 2*, and so demands your attention. Forget *Rayforce*'s gorgeous visuals and fantastic music, it's the exhilarating gameplay that make it so absorbing. You can either lock on to enemies and take them down with lasers, or simply blast the hell out of them. Either way, *Rayforce* remains one of the most challenging blasters we've played. An essential addition to an impressive compilation.



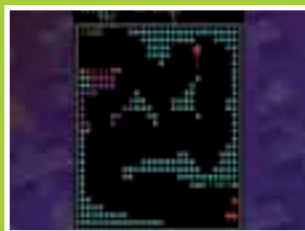
CAMELTRY

As with *Crazy Balloon*, *Cameltry* is another title that doesn't need to rely on fancy aesthetics to still be a great game. Each level is set in a maze and sees you guiding a sphere to an exit within a strict time limit. Unlike titles such as *Marble Madness*, you move your ball by manipulating the maze and letting gravity do the rest of the work. If this isn't tricky enough, you then have to deal with the many barriers and hazards that each level contains. *Cameltry* starts off simple but soon gets fiendishly tricky. Nevertheless those with a love of puzzlers most certainly won't be disappointed with this classic treasure.



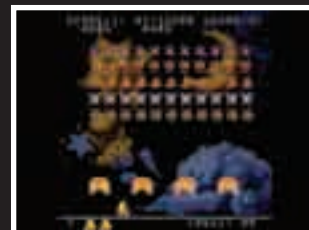
CRAZY BALLOON

Don't be fooled by its dated visuals, cruddy sound and simple-looking gameplay, *Crazy Balloon* is horribly addictive stuff. The aim of the game is simple: guide your balloon around a simple maze and reach the exit without bursting it. While it sounds straightforward, touching the walls or hitting the many moving objects will instantly cause the balloon to pop, and then you have to consider the fact that it constantly sways back and forth, and must therefore time your movement accordingly. A classic example that proves that playability counts for everything.



ALSO INCLUDING...

ALPINE SKI
ARABIAN MAGIC
BONZE ADVENTURE
CHACK 'N' POP
CLEOPATRA
DARIUS GAIDEN
DUNGEON MAGIC
FOOTBALL CHAMP
FORTUNE
FRONT LINE
GEKIRINDAN
GRID SEEKER:
PROJECT RAIMAIS
GROWL
GUN FRONTIER
INSECTOR X
KIKI KAIKAI
KURI KINTON
LEGEND OF KAGE
LUNAR RESCUE
MAGESTIC 12
METAL BLACK
PUZZLE BOBBLE 2
QIX
RASTAN 2
SPACE INVADERS DX
STORM HAMMER
THE FAIRYLAND STORY
VIOLENCE FIGHT
WILD WESTERN



SUMMING UP

It may not sport as many instant classics as its wonderful predecessor, but that doesn't mean that *Taito Legends 2* isn't worth owning – far from it, in fact. There is a staggering 39 titles, many of them pure gold. If we have any complaints, it's the same as those the original compilation suffered. You can't reconfigure buttons, some of the games aren't as perfectly emulated as we'd like and the lack of a Tate mode on the vertical games is a real shame. These slight issues aside, you'll discover one of the best value for money compilations since the original *Midway Arcade Treasures*.

OVERALL 91%

Why Don't They Remake...

SILENT BOMBER

CYBERCONNECT2'S LITTLE KNOWN ACTION GEM IS RIPE FOR AN OVERHAUL

Release: 1999
Format: PSOne
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Developer: CyberConnect2

It's no secret that games™ loves all things frenetic. From the likes of *Robotron* and *R-Type* through to recent triumphs such as *Devil May Cry 3* and *Ninja Gaiden*, nothing gets our gaming juice flowing quite like instinct-based action, which is why we fell in love with the little known and criminally underrated *Silent Bomber* on PSOne.

At its core, the game is a shooter; the twist is that instead of guns you use bombs. The hero of the piece, Jutah, looks like Dante after a few years with Al Qaeda. Thanks to a nifty Dash command, he is capable

of moving at ridiculous speeds, as well as laying explosives on his foes and detonating them before anyone even knows what happened.

As you may expect from a shooter, *Silent Bomber* didn't skimp on the bosses either, offering some of the largest, toughest milestones of the last gen. Anyone who managed to finally defeat its ultimate level deserves a medal, such is the dexterity and concentration needed. The only aspect where *Bomber* was left wanting was visuals. Even for a PSOne game it lacked clarity and detail, and often the player was left searching for his or her character during moments of mayhem.

We'd like to see *Silent Bomber's* pure gameplay translated to modern consoles – not necessarily 360, but a solid PS2 or Xbox version could



breathe new life into a series that never got off the ground. The chains of explosions and destruction were screaming out for visual intensity, lighting and particle effects that the modern machines can now deliver.

As for the bosses, they would now be limited only by the imagination of the designers rather than technological impositions. Screen-filling robots were awesome in 1999, but compared to the final enemy in *Shadow Of The Colossus*, for example, look nothing. We want to see multi-part bosses that have to be scaled and systematically destroyed with well-placed bombs – taking out supporting structures and upsetting their equilibrium.

With analogue control, dodging and dashing would feel much more organic than in the original; locating pockets of safety on the battlefield and navigating to them with full 360-degree control would add an extra layer of depth and thought to a game already firmly in the 'insane' camp. A good thing.

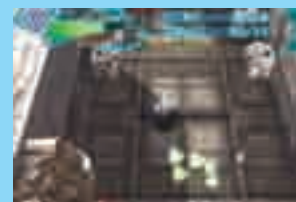
Another good thing would be the added incentive of score whoring, thanks to modern-day online gaming. Although we can't quite wrap our minds around how a multi-

player mode would work, simply having leader boards for each of the levels (as is fast becoming the norm) would see the hardcore elite putting in serious hours to become the world's best bombers. Jack Thompson might have something to say about that notion, though.

If someone did justice to *Silent Bomber*, we could see some real competition to the likes of *Devil May Cry*. We'd want it tough, unforgiving, faster than ever and as pretty as possible. Anything less, and we might as well stick to the original.

BOMBERMAN

It's no surprise that Jutah is a dab hand with the old explosives. Bizarrely enough, he can actually chain them in a similar way to the lock-on in *Rez*. Scooting around the levels and dropping bombs brings up a number telling you how many there are. Tap the detonate button once for each bomb dropped. Advanced players learn to delay certain bombs to maximise their damage.



LEANDER



LEANDER

Thanatos lurks in his lair, basking in the power sapping life-force he is sucking from Princess Lucania.

Princess Lucania is dying: imprisoned in the Sphere of Depletion her strength will soon be gone.

Meanwhile, Leander - Captain Of The Guards - kneels before his master seeking advice. He is told: *The princess is the balance between good and evil, if she dies, good dies and evil shall engulf the land.*

As Thanatos' power grows, the world succumbs to his evil grasp. Leander now has to face and conquer dangers beyond his darkest dreams before he can free the princess and save the land.

"You play the part of the Princess as she hangs around inside the Sphere Of Depletion waiting for Leander to rescue her. Will he make it? Or will you spend the entire game doing nothing but having your life-force sucked?"

Leander: Where horses Sphere to tread?

*Psygnosis reserve the right to amend this storyline.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Screen Shots from the Amiga Version



PSYGNOSIS
FREEPOST
LIVERPOOL L3 3AB
UNITED KINGDOM
Tel: 051-709 5755



EARTHWORM JIM™



A superb range character, a hefty dose of surrealism and some natty platform action all add up to one groovy game

LAUNCH TIME

There are many fine moments throughout *Earthworm Jim*, and it's difficult to pick one in particular, but we would have to opt for the cow launch. In a game that features as much surreal content as this, the standard has to be set early on, and the game manages this with style. After only a few minutes of play, you meet a cow on a rudimentary seesaw. It stands there, watching as you drop a fridge on one end and catapult it into the heavens. Of course, the cow has the last laugh, as it also features heavily in one of the most amusing game endings we've ever encountered.

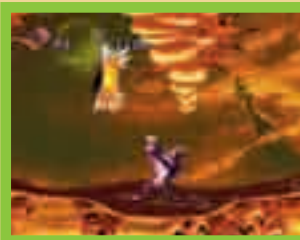


▲ Shoot the fridge, launch the cow. It really is that easy to make us laugh.

Release: 1994
Format: SNES, Mega Drive
Publisher: Playmates/Virgin
Developer: Shiny Entertainment

There have been many attempts at originality over the years and every so often we get a team that presents a title that's 'all-new'. Maybe it's a new way of dealing with a genre, or a fancy new feature that adds a new dimension to play, but few can claim to have created something that we'd never have dreamed of. Nope, many developers fail miserably when trying to 'weird' gamers out. It's a fact that we've been conditioned over the years and have been trained to cope with surprise attacks and abnormal enemies, but when *Earthworm Jim* arrived 12 years ago, few were prepared for the chaos.

The plot alone is absurd. Once a regular worm, Jim turned superhero when the Ultra-High-Tech-Indestructible-Super-Space-Cyber-Suit (aka Super Suit) was dropped by a space crow, and landed on top of him. Now charged with the tasks of rescuing Princess What's-Her-Name from the evil Queen Pulsating, Bloated, Festering, Sweaty, Pus-filled,



▲ We think all games should have a dancing Evil.

Malformed Slug-For-A-Butt and keeping the suit out of the hands of the demented Psy-Crow and Professor Monkey-For-A-Head, he had seven bizarre stages to blast his way through. Shiny triumphed when it came to thinking up ideas for the various missions, and there is a wealth of weirdness on offer to those that persevere through the game. Starting off your adventure in a junkyard, you progress on to Heck (which includes the Night On Bald Mountain soundtrack), an underwater hamster tube maze (which includes the most frustrating part of any game ever – you must remember that glass orb that smashes, killing you instantly after a few wall hits?) and then finally to the Queen's home planet, Buttvile.

Of course, the real treat is the level of gameplay that *Earthworm*



▲ Use your wormy head to whip a puppy. Great.

Jim delivers. Frantic 360-degree firing sets the base for most of the stages, with reasonably complex whipping and swinging sections complementing the action nicely. Between each and every one of the aforementioned levels you're forced to engage in a rocket race with Psy-Crow which, if lost, results in an extra boss battle with the pesky bird – unnecessary really, as awesome bosses are a frequent affair.

These bosses really were some of the greatest ever seen. We've all faced giant spaceships and monsters before, but a showdown with the rather scratchy Evil the evil cat? Well, that's something special. And to finally conquer the evil genius Bob The Goldfish (a task completed merely by walking into a table and knocking over his bowl – actually achievable in about two seconds),



▲ The level entitled 'Heck' featured evil lawyers that threw paperwork at you and hid behind a briefcase shield.

"SHINY TRIUMPHED WHEN IT CAME TO MISSION IDEAS"

you'd have to be rather sceptical not to appreciate the genius. However, as good as they are, all the bosses in the game are shown up by Major Mucus the bungee jumping bogie.

Taking place in the obviously named Snot A Problem level, you control Jim as he ties his long, stretchy head to a hook and competes with Major Mucus in a bungee competition. Gradually you wear away his support by barging him into walls, and eventually he drops into the goo at the bottom of the pit. "Success!" you cry, before realising that you just completed the easiest of the three bungee rounds. We just loved it.



Fortunately, we weren't the only ones. The greatness of *Earthworm Jim* was recognised by many and an adequate sequel was produced a year later, then followed a 3D offering on the N64, and eventually a decent animated series also turned up to provide playgrounds with a host of annoying catchphrases.

As great as all this was, though, none of them ever quite showed the same inventiveness that the original displayed and the first title still remains the best by far. Who knows, maybe we'll see Jim and friends again some day – there's certainly still a lot of potential left for the franchise to fulfil.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1994



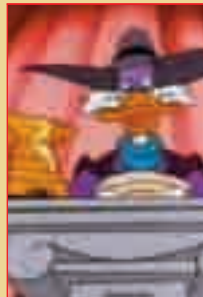
ON THE RADIO

No matter where you were, what you were doing or listening to, *Saturday Night* by Whigfield managed to worm its way into your ears throughout 1994. Despite being wretchedly annoying and having a stupid video showing the starlet drying her hair, wearing only a towel, the song managed to dominate the charts due to people buying it anyway.



AT THE MOVIES

For some reason it was thought necessary to create a live-action film based around kids' favourite *The Flintstones*. Starring John Goodman, Rick Moranis and Halle Berry, we only realised how good this was once the hateful sequel – *Viva Rock Vegas* – made an appearance with no famous faces and showed us exactly how a film shouldn't be done.



ON THE TELEVISION

Disney's *Darkwing Duck* unfortunately came to an end in 1994 after enjoying none of the success it deserved. It was kind of like *Duck Tails* but had mild-mannered Drake Mallard instead of Scrooge McDuck. It also had more superheroes. As a bonus, it featured *Duck Tails* characters Gizmoduck and Launchpad on a regular basis. Let's get dangerous indeed.



▲ Racing Psy-Crow was not only really tough as you neared the finale, it also gave you one hell of a headache.

1000

Retro
Feature

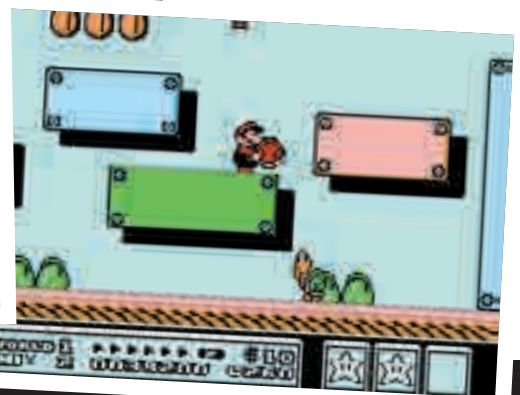
GREATEST RETRO GAMES

**The votes have been
counted and the
results are in...**

PART 2

50-01

Here we are then – the final countdown of the greatest games of yesteryear as chosen by you, the readers. Of course, there are some surprising omissions from the list; we expected to see *Final Fantasy VIII*, *Star Wars: The Arcade Game* or *Sim City* making an appearance, but they all failed to make the final cut. So what is in the list? Games that have proved themselves timeless, games that were not only revolutionary in their day but that still offer a challenge and a hefty dose of playability today. You can expect to see plumbers, you can look forward to Link, you can anticipate James Bond and you can be prepared for 50 games that can truly be regarded as the cream of the crop. Should it be Sega or Nintendo getting those acceptance speeches ready as they carry off the title of Best Retro Game Ever? Read on and all will be revealed...





Tetsuya Mizuguchi's masterpiece powerslides into the top 50. If only all rally games were this fun.



Sega Rally

Long before the magical *Colin McRae* took over the rally game market, it was Sega's arcade classic that ruled the roost. Choosing from a trio of vehicles, you compete over a quartet of challenging tracks jam-packed with jumps and seemingly unbeatable bends. While today we expect rally games to all be as realistic as possible, *Sega Rally's* focus was on fun as well as playability. The game comes

into its own when two machines are linked up allowing for the ultimate in head-to-head action.

Tetsuya Mizuguchi's baby will always go down as one of the finest arcade racers of all time; beautiful graphics, sublime handling, and at the time at least, some of the most immersive gameplay available in the arcades.

50



Tomb Raider

One of the games that helped shift the original PlayStation, Lara Croft's debut adventure ushered in a new era of 'Girl Power' as our heroine travelled the world grabbing ancient treasures. Before the series was diluted with rushed and unimpressive sequels, Lara did actually spend her time raiding tombs and the puzzles were ingenious and tricky. In terms of its influence over the genre and a million substandard adventures since, *Tomb Raider* was arguably the last generation's most iconic title.



Lara's first outing was a generation defining and genre redefining work of genuine artistry.



Billy and Jimmy Lee are legends. Their scrap at the end of the game is one of gaming's all time great fights.



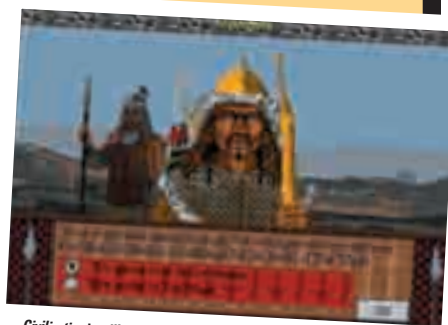
Double Dragon

Who can forget those days huddled over the arcade version of this fighting classic? The two-player action revolves around Billy and Jimmy Lee – two brothers who set off to save Billy's girlfriend from a notorious street gang. One of the finest co-operative gaming experiences ever, *Double Dragon* spawned a plethora of less-impressive sequels and even a big screen adventure, which is probably best forgotten.



Civilization

Proof, if any were needed that not all gamers are gun-obsessed psychos, and that not all software is brimming with brainless violence, *Civilization* revolves around becoming the king of the world, instead. Once you've explored and begun developing your colony, the creation starts in earnest with cities being built, different technologies brought into play and a military presence established. Basically, if it happens in the real world it happens in the game. Oh, the days we wasted playing this; we'll never get that time back.



Civilization is still going strong today; Sid Meier hit a home run when he created this little beauty.



Sonic & Knuckles

There's always the risk that if you try to add another major character to an iconic series, it'll water down the property. However, *Sonic* managed to pull off this trick not once but twice, first with the introduction of Tails and then with

Knuckles who got top billing in this entertaining and

challenging sequel. Gameplay was the same fast-paced ring collecting as before, with Robotnik attempting to acquire the biggest Chaos Emerald of them all and thus gain absolute power. A unique element of the game was the ability to combine it with your copy of *Sonic 2*, making Knuckles a playable character in the older game. Clever.



46



Knuckles is an echidna. And no, we have no idea what that means.



Guybrush is a legend. More funny videogame characters please.



The Secret Of Monkey Island 2

45

One of the finest adventure series of them all, the *Monkey Island* games combined devilishly intelligent puzzles with genuinely humorous dialogue. *Monkey Island 2* also features impressive, hand-painted graphics that help to bring the pirate world to life. It's the characters that make

Monkey Island 2 a classic, though, with the return of Guybrush Threepwood and the evil ghost pirate LeChuck. Add a cast of demented pirates and you have one of LucasArts' finest moments.



Chaos 44

A turn-based wizard adventure for the Spectrum, *Chaos* was written by Julian Gollop who later became famous for the *X-Com* series. *Chaos* sees up to eight wizards fighting it out, summoning creatures and wiping out fellow magicians. In the turn-based adventure, wizards can be controlled by humans or the computer, and each has a three-phased attack: the selection of spells, the casting of magic and the use of combat. The game was nothing special to look at, but the action was completely addictive.



Ugly game, great gameplay. Don't judge a book by its cover.



War has never been so much fun. Sensible Software could do no wrong.



Cannon Fodder 43

Cannon Fodder stands with *Lemmings* and *Worms* as one of the most revered and devilishly fun party games of all time. Unlike the majority of war games out there, this game has its tongue firmly in its cheek at all times – and rather than having to learn strategies and plan for hours – you just send your guys in and cause instant havoc. It's fast, it's furious, it's brilliant.



The New Zealand Story

One of the platform games that brings a smile to the faces of an entire generation of gamers, *The New Zealand Story* remains one of Taito's finest arcade favourites. As feathered hero Tiki, you must free your friends who've been kidnapped from a New Zealand zoo by a nefarious sea lion. A classic platform adventure that uses every cliché in the book, yet still manages to be challenging and fun.



Is there a more distressing sight in videogames than watching little Tiki drown?

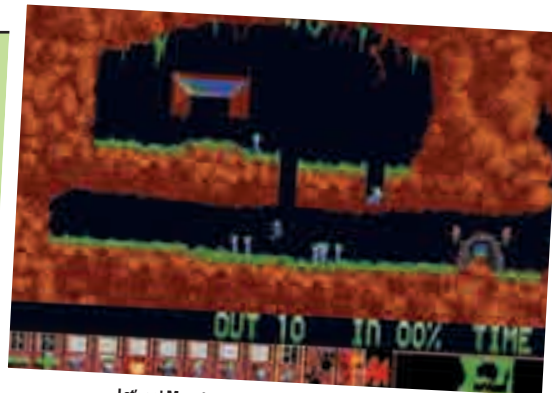


Lemmings

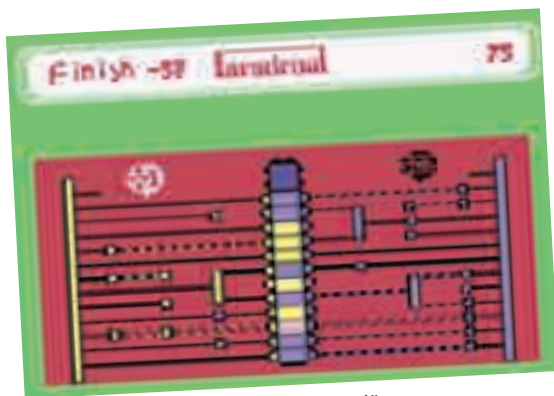
41

Is there anyone alive who hasn't wasted years of their lives trying to stop herds of little green-haired goons falling to their deaths? We imagine not. On paper the game may sound over simplistic – just keep the lemmings alive – but like all the greatest games, there are so

many hidden depths here that even a decade on, you'll still discover new tactics to clear the levels. The Amiga version may remain the best-remembered, but *Lemmings* has graced pretty much every console, from the original mono Game Boy right up to Sony's PSP.



Let's go! Many hours were toiled away hunched over an Amiga with our little green-haired friends.



It may just be a bunch of red and lines, but it STILL looks nicer than *Driv3r*.



Paradroid

40

The Commodore 64 had its fair share of space adventures, but few were as deep and atmospheric as the much-loved *Paradroid*. Taking control of robots, your task is to explore spaceships and try to survive in a futuristic environment. Each space freighter is made up of sections that have to be cleared one by one and once you've eradicated all the druids in one area

you move onto the next. Finally, when the whole ship is clear you're then beamed onto the next craft. A game that certainly brings back fond memories, *Paradroid* is a game that's more than simple to play but – thanks to the massive maps it includes – it isn't one you can complete in a hurry. A fact that enters it into the top half of the 100 greatest retro games today.



Robotron

39

In the middle of the arcade revolution of the early Eighties, *Robotron* arrived and blew gamers away with its fast and furious space-based action. You play as Earth's only hope against the evil Robotron and must blast at anything in sight. Luckily you're well equipped to take them on, with eight directions to fire in and an innovative two-joystick control method

at your ready-and-willing fingertips. The gameplay is all about movement and finding ways to avoid the enemy who constantly spawn around you. The graphics are basic yet colourful, but overall it's the game's playability that makes *Robotron* such an iconic title.



Xbox Live Arcade has seen *Robotron* given a new lease of life. Addictive as hell.



Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe

This *Bitmap Brothers* sequel is a sports game with a difference. Whereas many sports titles go for realism and authenticity, *Speedball 2* rewards you for taking the rulebook and throwing it out the window. It's a game where 'only the strong survive', as this futuristic league kicks off and is a case of getting the ball in the opponent's goal by any means necessary. One of the best multi player games of the Amiga era.



It's impossible to talk about *Speedball 2* without using the word 'furious'.



The Game Boy Advance version cannot hold a torch to this classic shooter.



Gunstar Heroes

Treasure's debut on the Mega Drive features some of the best graphics and gameplay ever seen on the system. Just when Nintendo fans were claiming that the Super Nintendo had pretty much finished off the Mega Drive, *Gunstar Heroes* showed what could still be done. Facing huge bosses, the camera zooms in and out creating tension as you stagger towards the climax where you try and defeat the ultimate enemy... brilliant.

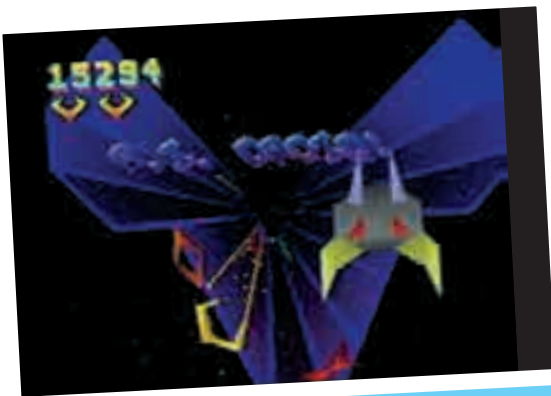


Metal Slug

A classic *Rambo*-style story mixed with intense shooting action created one of the Neo Geo's crowning moments; the popularity of *Metal Slug* is proven by its appearance on almost every machine since. Traverse the jungles, blasting at enemy soldiers, helicopters and hulking great bosses; *Metal Slug* has it all and features a hefty amount of humour throughout to boot. Don't be fooled by the cartoony look though, this remains one tough cookie.



Fast, funny, violent and bloody hard. *Metal Slug* will never, ever fail to be awesome.



One of the few reasons to bother buying a Jaguar, *Tempest 2000* was superb.



Tempest 2000

35

There's really no way of improving upon the genius gameplay of the original *Tempest*, so for this update on the much-maligned Jaguar, Atari successfully kept the spirit of the original alive, rather than watering down the action with some sort of lame 3D update. If anything, the gameplay of *Tempest 2000* was even harder to master than in the original, with all the old enemies

returning, as well as some brand new adversaries too. The biggest change to the update is the way that the whole playfield undulates and ripples, creating all kinds of bizarre effects while you play. There's also a decent two-player mode and, of course, the original arcade game is available in the package too. What more could you possibly ask for?



Daytona USA

34

Daytona USA came to two separate Sega consoles – the Saturn and the Dreamcast – and remains one of its most loved racers. The game is noted for the intelligence of fellow drivers who react to not only your driver but also other computer-controlled foes as they all jostle for

the best position. While in order to win the race you'll have to avoid them, one of our best memories of the game is the multiple car pile-ups – we'd like to say that we can smile as we speed past the lumps of metal, but normally we're in amongst the debris ourselves.



Daytona still regularly pulls in the punters at Sega Parks the country over.



Yoshi's Island

How do you follow up one of the most revered platform adventures of all time? If you're Miyamoto, you remove the central character and let one of his faithful sidekicks take centre stage. And it worked a treat. Even though the N64 was drawing ever closer when the game was released, *Yoshi's Island* still stunned with its colourful and detailed graphics. The best thing about controlling Yoshis is that they can eat enemies and then spit them out, bringing smiles to the faces of gamers everywhere.



Quite possibly the most beautiful 2D game ever crafted.



The first foray into 3D adventuring was quite an impressive achievement.



Dungeon Master

With your quartet of brave warriors, you journey into the dungeons and traverse the darkened corridors, fighting all kinds of creepy foes. *Dungeon Master* improves upon the combat systems of similar games of the time and the inventory system is easier to decode than others in the genre. In fact, the interfaces here influenced most titles of this sort for many years to come.



Gradius

Pure shoot-'em-up nirvana, *Gradius* was a mainstay of the mid-Eighties arcade and has stood the test of time more than most. Gameplay is classic 'destroy waves of enemies' fun and requires you to have cat-like reflexes if you're to survive. Defeat a barrage of foes, collect power-ups and choose from a variety of enhancements. *Gradius* proved so popular that Konami even released a parody entitled *Parodius*, where the aliens and space environments were replaced with pastel colours and cats.



Nothing beats the thrill of a classic 2D shooter. The genre is still extremely popular today.



The dream game of many a collector, Sega's seminal RPG still more than holds its own today.

1 2 3 4 5

Panzer Dragoon Saga

30

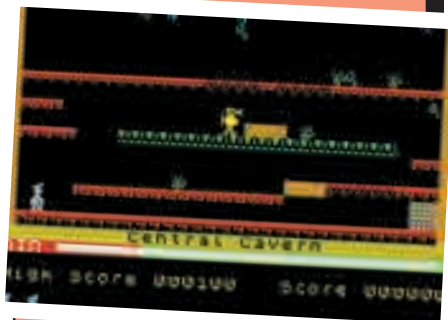
A true triumph from Saturn, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* filled the RPG-based-around-dragons hole that we never even knew existed in our lives. This cinematic adventure – the third and final part in the trilogy – is notable for the decent voice acting and impressive FMV sequences. It's also notable for its incredible size – *Panzer Dragoon Saga* spanned a quartet

of wonderful game discs. The deep and enthralling story revolves around Edge – a young gun for hire, as well as a mysterious and beautiful girl with many, many secrets. Undoubtedly one of the greatest non-Hedgehog moments in Sega's history, we can often still find ourselves immersed in *Panzer Dragoon Saga*'s hypnotic world today – and rightly so.

1 2 3 4 5

Manic Miner

With the simplest of control methods and the slightest of stories, *Manic Miner* thrilled a generation of gamers and remains one of the platform genre's finest moments. Our hero Willy has stumbled down a mineshaft and discovered a new civilisation. This means running and jumping around a huge number of rooms avoiding all kinds of bizarre foes, collecting cash and opening the portal to the next challenging cavern. The thing with *Manic Miner* is that when you fail, you KNOW it's your fault.



The most annoying game of all time. And one of the best.



More Monkey Island magic. The original, and the best.

1 2 3 4 5

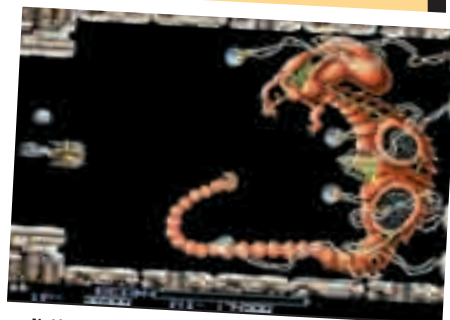
The Secret Of Monkey Island

We're not surprised that this slice of the hilarious series has leapt above its followers in the chart because it was the original chapter that really stood out as proof that LucasArts was onto something big. While passing the trials necessary to become a top pirate, Threepwood falls for Elaine, but just when things seem to be going his way she's kidnapped by the ghostly pirate LeChuck and a gaming legend is born... albeit one whose weapon of choice is a rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle.

1 2 3 4 5

R-Type

The king of scrolling shoot-'em-ups, *R-Type*, sees increasingly tricky aliens attacking you from all angles. Your ship may be small, but by holding down the fire button, your shot becomes all-powerful and can slice through enemies like a hot knife through butter. The most memorable part of *R-Type* is the strange and grotesque bosses. They may not equal the pus-filled mutants of the *Contra* series for horror, but they are some of the hardest we've encountered.



Nothing beats a bit of *R-Type*. Still one of the most perfectly balanced videogames ever made.

1 2 3 4 5

OutRun

26

Accelerate. Steer. Dodge. DON'T CRASH. Oh, how we do love a good game of *OutRun*. Never has a racing game managed to feel so American and so darned cute as you cruise down the highway with a hot babe in the passenger seat and the wind in your hair. *OutRun* is set up so that you can afford maybe one crash, but anything more than that and

you'll be crying as you watch the timer hit zero while you're mere centimetres from the finish line. It's the ultimate 'just one more go' challenge. Add to this multiple routes, colourful graphics and a great soundtrack (Magical Sound Shower, anyone?) and you'll have your very own great Sega treat.

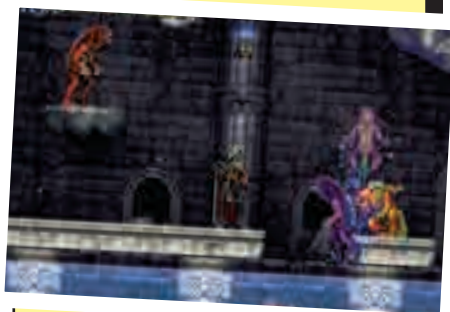


OutRun is so seminal it's been reincarnated many times on many formats.

Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night

25

The most revered of Konami's *Dracula* epics, *Symphony Of The Night* saw the series make its transition to Sony's wonder-console; with this came quality cinematic scenes and a very atmospheric experience. All that made it a smash on the NES was improved and *SOTN* had the value of a Hollywood movie not just a gaming sequel.



The Belmonts really hate vampires.
Nobody hates vampires as much as the Belmonts



Still many people's football game of choice.
If only PES had its management options.



Sensible World Of

24

You'd think it would be impossible to improve upon the classic football brilliance of *Sensible Soccer*, but this updated version somehow did just that. The action remains the same but *Sensible World Of Soccer* adds improved graphics and updated teams. There are also more weather conditions to opt for, greatly changing how players react to the action.

Super Mario Bros. 3

23

After the not-a-proper-sequel-but-still-a-massive-hit thrills of *SMB2*, some fans might have thought that the bubble was ready to burst, but it didn't. It was Hollywood movie/advert *The Wizard* that first showed fans the beauty of *Super Mario Bros. 3*, and no fan of the plumber left that movie without instantly running to the shops to put a deposit down on what was to become possibly the greatest NES game of them all.



The first time we ran behind that block, we nearly cried.
We were very young.



The game that started it all. The most influential FPS ever.



Half-Life

22

It's actually very tricky to conceive that the world of PC online gaming ever existed at all before *Half-Life*, such is the success and influence of Valve's mega-hit. What put *Half-Life* above all the other games in the genre was the fact that it featured an exciting and challenging single-player mode as well as the usual multi-player shenanigans. The story of

scientist Gordon Freeman and his fight against monstrous creatures caught the imaginations of all gamers and soon it was not only sweeping up Game Of The Year awards left, right and centre, but fans were modding the game and adding their favourite characters to the mix as well. Valve released its own follow-up product, and you know the rest...



Metal Gear Solid

21

Solid Snake may not have originated on the PSOne but it was this machine that showed exactly what espionage titles were capable of with the iconic thrills of *MGS*. A truly adult adventure, the game managed to reproduce *Bond*-style thrills better than any *007* game

to date. The cinematics pushed the PlayStation to its limit, and the sneaking stealth play revolutionised the genre. While PS2 versions may have had too much story and rambling cut-scenes, the original is all about the action and remains one of the machine's finest moments.



If it wasn't for Solid Snake, there would be far less stealth in this world.



Red things with funny legs were all the rage in the Amiga days.



Turrican 2

20

The first *Turrican* game was an absolutely brilliant blaster and the sequel maintains that exact same brainless playability, only now our hero has even more firepower at his disposal. Armed as he is with a new power suit, *Turrican* is now capable of blasting in any direction – very handy, especially seeing as the enemies

never let up while the action intensifies throughout the game. When he finds himself in a particularly sticky situation, *Turrican* can transform himself into a tiny gyroscope that can be used to lay mines, wiping out anything and everything that gets in the way. Variety is the name of the game. And the game is good. Very good.



Doom

While it may have caused more than a few sleepless nights for Jack Thompson, gamers have embraced the *Doom* series in all its guises – including the big screen version that hit the top spot in the US recently. It may have been *Wolfenstein* that shook things up, but id's follow-up *Doom* raised the bar with all its weapons. Enemies came thick and fast and who could forget the terrifying presence of those big red demonic blobs – this truly is the stuff of nightmares.



This is the least exciting *Doom* screenshot we could find for you.



There's nothing like kicking the living hell out of a big group of sprites.



Streets Of Rage 2

An instant classic, *Streets Of Rage 2* showed what Sega could do with its 16Mb cartridges. It was a huge graphical improvement over the original and the levels were also much larger. The duo of characters from the first game are joined by two new ones, and this time all the fighters have their own move-sets that vary greatly for each combatant. Of course, these new moves come in very handy, as there are also more enemies. If you tire of fighting evil, you can always fight each other with the new two-player Duel mode, an answer to the increasingly popular *Street Fighter* series.



Tetris

A simple but devilishly addictive puzzler. Tetris the Game Boy version will be the most widely revered, but it can also be seen as a major contributor to the success of the console. The greatest Russian export since vodka, the rotating block title is remembered for its ace soundtrack and its unbeatable gameplay – there are few who couldn't hum the classic theme and even fewer who have not gone to bed with images of bricks falling through their minds.



The most unanimously popular videogame ever? Quite possibly. No, definitely.



Sonic The Hedgehog 2

Sega's prickly blue mascot returns for his second dose of high-speed platforming nonsense, this time he's accompanied by a new hero, Miles 'Tails' Prower. (Geddit, miles per hour?) Gameplay is essentially the same as that of the original *Sonic* title – the story sees Dr Robotnik, once again trying to take over the world, this time by turning cute little

animals into robots. Sonic the Hedgehog and Tails must restore peace by collecting all the chaos emeralds while also storing rings. Bigger than the first game, it also introduces a two-player option, where you can race against each other. One of the Mega Drive's greatest titles, Sonic's legend was firmly cemented here in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*.



Tails is an annoying little cretin. Not as annoying as Charmy the Bee, though.



Playing as the bosses is just so satisfying. Though what people called them varied. Balrog? No, that's Bison. He's Vega. Whatever.



Street Fighter II Turbo

Occasionally when a company has a great deal of success with a videogame, sequels are rushed out almost immediately. But that was not the case when *Street Fighter II* hit it big. Oh no, instead, Capcom began tweaking the game and attempting to improve on perfection. *Street Fighter II Turbo* is the best of these upgrades, offering yet more characters

to go with all the originals. As well as the new additions, the game now plays much faster than it ever did and there's also an all-new colour scheme throughout as well. Underneath all of this, the original intense gameplay remains and we've completely lost count of how many coins we wasted on this back in the arcade day. Of course, it wasn't actually wasted money.



Shenmue

One of the Dreamcast's finest hours, *Shenmue* is among only a few games that can best be described as 'art'. Taking on the role of Ryo, players are thrown into a world where you decide your own path and shape your own destiny. The environments are brought to life through beautiful visuals and a sweeping soundtrack. The player is granted a lot of freedom; you can play the game at whatever pace you like. *Shenmue* is as close to a true interactive movie as games have yet come.



A beautiful and colourful secret that took a fair few game hours to reveal.



NiGHTs Into Dreams

Describing the game is tricky as, being an amalgam of the racing and platform genres, *NiGHTs* doesn't really fit into any one category. It may be played out in a dreamworld, but it's still a classic tale of good versus evil as the brilliantly named Wizeman the Wicked attempts to break through into the real world. One of the most colourful and imaginative games ever, *NiGHTs* captures a dream world that you won't want to wake up from. Worth buying a Saturn for.



We wish we could fly, right up to the sky, but we can't. Unfortunately.



The Secret Of Mana

Youthful curiosity might be a magical thing, but not when it unleashes chaos around the world. This is what happens in *The Secret Of Mana* when our hero pulls the Mana sword from a stone – he must find eight Mana seeds to restore the seal that will return harmony to the world. Our hero sets off on his journey, an adventure filled with magic, adventure and real-time fighting. What separates *Secret Of Mana* from other RPGs was its use of vibrant colours, it also uses the SNES's Mode 7 technology to bring the world to life. The *Mana* series is second only to *Zelda* in the king of the RPG stakes.



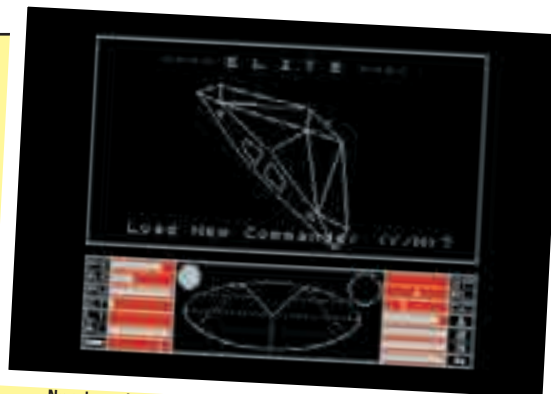
The only time we've ever looked for sailors. That's the honest truth.



Elite

When Ian Bell and David Braben grew bored of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*, they decided to take the plunge and make their own game. Instead of merely focusing on score like most of the genre, their game would involve exploration, with rewards for trading and interaction, and so *Elite* was born. Soon, pretty much every BBC user had a copy of the game

and the pair had a huge hit on their hands. Suddenly every computer user was a space pirate. Every copy of the game came with a postcard to send back to the company if you managed to reach Elite Status. The pair didn't expect anyone to play for this long, so when piles of them started to arrive, they knew they had something special and a software legend was born.



Never have white lines been so entertaining. Can you reach Elite status? We can.

Super Metroid

Isn't it always the way? You're on a routine space mission and you discover a powerful new life force, only to be ambushed by space pirates who nick the new creature and create a whole race of killing machines. Welcome to the world of *Super Metroid*... The adventures of Samus, whose mission is to eradicate the pirates and restore calm by destroying the creatures now known as Metroids, proved a big hit with gamers, and this Super Nintendo incarnation is widely regarded as one of the console's finest moments.



Why, whenever you lose a load of abilities is Kraid always in the way?



Forever blowing bubbles?
You can be sure of it with Bub and Bob on the case.

Bubble Bobble

Taito's magical arcade adventure remains one of the most colourful and loved games ever as two dinosaurs Bub and Bob attempt to rescue their girlfriends by traversing 100 levels of bubble-bursting fun. In the arcade, *Bubble Bobble* was infamous thanks to the fact that the single player could not see the end until drafting in a second gamer. See, it even brings people together.

Street Fighter II

This sequel blew the lid off the genre and became the biggest and most iconic fighting title of all time. While the arcade version was a deserved smash, many experienced the game thanks to the brilliance of the Super Nintendo, thought to be the definitive edition. Capcom continued to enhance and tweak the game in numerous instalments, but this is still the Nintendo incarnation that you took to your hearts.



Learning to do a Hadoken for the first time ever, really hurts your thumb. Do you remember?

Super Mario 64

It's unbelievably difficult to put into actual words the experience of playing *Super Mario 64* for the first time – we imagine it was something akin to watching colour television after years of black and white. Here, finally, was the world of the illustrious plumber fully realised in three glorious dimensions with the freedom to

go absolutely anywhere. The Nintendo 64 was born and we were loving it. The legacy of the game lives on, of course, with the Nintendo DS console also opting to use the game as a launch title where *Super Mario 64* proved to be just as playable and challenging as ever. It's still much better than *Sunshine*.



Finding Yoshi on the roof was a little disappointing, but on the whole *Mario 64* was tough to top.

GoldenEye

A tie-in based on the latest *Bond* adventure? Normally this is a recipe for disaster, or at least a recipe for an average game. *GoldenEye* broke all the rules by being a smash hit with *Bond* fanatics and also offering unsurpassed gameplay for everyone else. The game followed

the story of the movie closely and all the locations were faithfully reproduced. The one-player game was brilliant, but it's the multi-player that *GoldenEye* will be remembered for. Fans are still calling for a proper remake rather than the watered down *Bond* titles of today.



Select the Facility level and then hide in the toilets – we all know how it works.



Final Fantasy VII 5

That *Final Fantasy VII* is one of the only games on this list to come with a spoiler warning speaks volumes about how strong its story was. Right? Wrong. Ask anyone to recall the game's story and only ardent fans will be able to untangle the messy tale of the Life Stream, Mako reactors and the Jenova project that birthed Sephiroth.

Instead – and now is the time to engage your spoiler alarms gentlemen – it was Aeris' death that has preserved *Final Fantasy VII*'s place in gaming's unspoken Hall of Fame.

Having seen her relationship with Cloud gently blossom and your dependence on Aeris as the healer slowly increase, her sudden death was an unexpected jolt that broke RPG convention. If the various stories we've heard are to be believed, it's one of the few twists that actually made gamers cry.

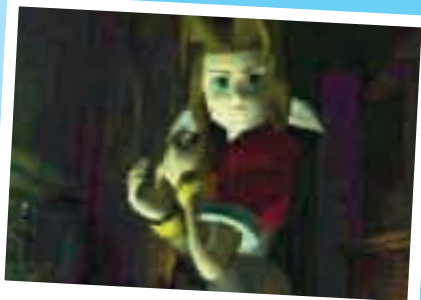
Yet Aeris' death shouldn't detract from *Final Fantasy VII*'s main achievement elsewhere – namely, it was the first RPG to successfully bridge the gap from 16-bit to 32-bit and brought the niche genre kicking and screaming into the western mainstream. The production values hadn't been matched by anything else at the time and, along with the brilliant way you could create Materia combinations, its popularity quickly soared. The purists argue that Locke's story in *Final Fantasy VI* was more engaging, while series latecomers have often sided with Squall and Rinoa's protracted love story in *Final Fantasy VIII*. It doesn't matter. *Final Fantasy VII* provided RPGs with a much-needed jolt in the arm and gave us one of gaming's all-time iconic images. Job done.



Got a few hours to spare?
Plenty of us did and there were few better ways to spend them.

IN THE BEGINNING

The opening moments of *Final Fantasy VII* throw you into the heart of the action with little explanation of what's actually going on, leaving you to slowly piece the plot together. What was more obvious was the sudden, shocking jump in production values. This was the moment that you realised next-generation gaming had truly arrived.



Zelda: Link To The Past 4

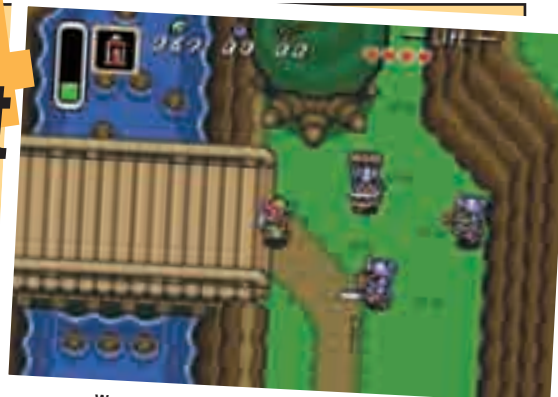
We're not at all surprised that Link's most memorable adventure (at least in our eyes) appears so high in this countdown – at least one member of the team cites it as the defining game of their childhood, with others nodding their approval. Certainly, the SNES helped take our Hyrulian hero to new heights by taking what had already proved a huge success (the original *Zelda* formula, as opposed to the side-scrolling approach of the sequel) and making it... well, more.

For starters, there's a proper story – complete with side-quests and table-turning twists, and whereas before you were never given any true indication of where to go or what to do, *Link To The Past* hangs together better in terms of sheer logical progression.

Of course, it's so beautifully vibrant, packed into a world full of character and life, and the fact that it takes advantage of the SNES's abilities makes a big difference too. From zooming around the map in Mode 7 to the incredibly elaborate (for the time) bosses, not to mention the way the game teases areas

that you can't reach before rewarding you with new and interesting items that allow you to progress – the game is a delight to behold.

Indeed, we still afford ourselves the pleasure of saving Princess Zelda in her SNES form to this day, despite the fact that we appear to be mastering the art of finishing it in record time. Long gone are the days when we had to hunt high and low for those last few Pieces of Heart.



We never did find out why that fairy near the end was so fat.
It concerns us greatly every day.



GOING UNDERGROUND

There are just so many to choose from, but if pressed we'd have to plump for the fourth dungeon in the Dark World: Blind's Hideout. You spend all your time down in the dungeon attempting to rescue a totally harmless little girl... and then she turns out to be the evil thief boss Blind, and tries to kill you? Not so harmless any more eh? Now where's the justice in that? We asks you.





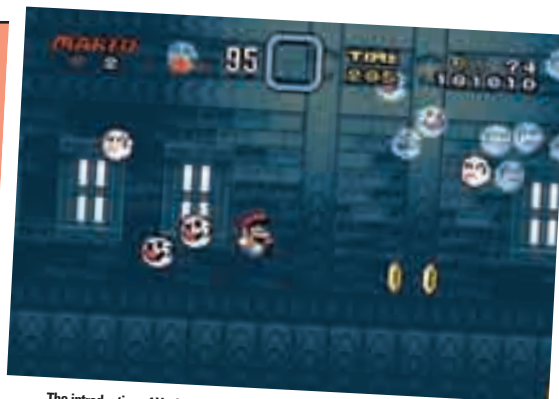
Super Mario World

As a launch game for the SNES, Nintendo really couldn't have done much better than *Super Mario World*. And that's not just because it heralded the return of Mario, who had taken on the role of being 'the face of videogames' at the time with great pleasure – indeed, we'd be more inclined to point out how the game was easy to get into, challenging enough to test players to their limits and had enough levels, bosses and secrets to keep you playing for a long, long time. Nintendo's genius was already well catalogued... but it took *Super Mario World* to prove it to a wider audience.

Of course, the actual action of the game isn't exactly original, especially given the previous success of *Super Mario Bros. 3* on the NES – platform jumping, enemy stomping and Bowser beating are all very much the order of the day, although we're hardly going to complain about that.

However, *Super Mario World* manages to combine some more detailed landscapes and interesting new faces (including the first ever appearance from Nintendo regular Yoshi

– which means 'happy' in Japanese) with the capable effects of the SNES to create an even more absorbing game. And naturally, it's a massive mountain to climb too; finishing the game might not take that long (although it's certainly long enough) but finding all 96 'exits' and seeing everything is incredibly hard. Still, the challenge is certainly worth the effort. Just don't mention the word Tubular to us, or we're liable to run away screaming.



The introduction of Yoshi, the Koopa Kids and Bowser in a big clown head... Could it have been any better?



THAT'S SPECIAL

Does a bit where you don't even have to do anything count as a standout moment? We think so, especially as it also involves listening to some kick-ass music. Unlock the Special World through the already secret Star Road and then sit back for some retro samba stylings – it doesn't get much better than that, now does it?



The time travel sequence is still glorious to behold. *Ocarina Of Time* is as brilliant today as ever it was.



The Legend Of Zelda: The Ocarina Of Time

2

Sure, Aiji Aonuma's little green creation has featured a fair few times in this countdown, but we really have saved the best until last. *Ocarina Of Time* was an adventure of such scale that no one can deny the sheer involvement of the experience. There have been few games more absorbing, with events that occurred throughout the game rating highly in many people's fondest gaming memories. Whether it's the sadness felt when you

realised you'd have to grow up without Saria, the panic that the battle with the giant Dodongo conjured, or the annoyance of the kid in the graveyard that refused to take the Skull Mask off you when you were so sure that he wanted it, we were all touched by the game in one way or another.

In fact, while we're on the subject of annoyance, *Ocarina Of Time* also featured what's considered one of the most irritating temples of all time – namely, the Water Temple. Changing the depth of the water led to hours being lost, and was almost as frustrating as watching those camp carpenters run around while trying to catch Cuccos in the Kakariko Village.

This aside, there was nothing but wonder on offer and, of course, nothing could prepare you for the game's end where Gannon revealed his true minotaur form after faking death. In fact, we're off to have a play now, there are bound to be a few Skulltulas we haven't managed to find yet.

HORSE PLAY

There are many moments throughout *Ocarina Of Time* that deserve a mention, but our favourite just has to be when you finally get on the back of the adult Epona and escape Lon Lon Ranch in style by leaping over the rear fence. The image of Epona rearing up in front of the setting sun will forever be with us.



Super Mario Kart



And so we arrive at the ultimate entry in our monumental countdown – and it's a choice that might come as a little bit of a surprise. Given the fact that this series is still going today, though, and that the DS version has sold almost a million copies in this territory at the time of writing, it's perhaps not so astonishing that *Super Mario Kart* should take the top spot.

With this deceptively simple little racer, Nintendo invented the character-based racing game genre that it still continues to dominate. By pitting its entire catalogue of characters against each other on the racetrack, Nintendo created a series that has survived for more than ten years and, incredibly, still proves itself both exceptionally popular and as fun as it ever was back in 1992.

Memories of tearing around this classic SNES game's pancake-flat tracks, holding back red shells until the final lap before

finally zipping past opponents right at the finish line still have us grinning in triumph. With the introduction of items to the racing genre, Nintendo took the emphasis off sheer racing skill (although it played a tremendously important role) and put it squarely back on having fun. Multi-player especially. *Mario Kart* ranks among the best games ever made and few come close to emulating the sheer elation of winning a hard-fought, neck and neck race around Mario Circuit 1 by only the slightest of margins.

Perhaps the best thing about *Super Mario Kart*, especially in relation to the subsequent games, is its sheer difficulty. It wasn't until we nonchalantly decided to work through to Rainbow Road to get screenshots for this feature that we remembered how excruciatingly, fist-eatingly difficult the



Never has timing been as important as it was at the beginning of each *Mario Kart* race. It honed our reflexes for life.

150cc cup challenges really were – winning the Special Cup is a feat of sheer will and determination due to the monstrously good luck of the AI opponents. And yet that's part of what makes *Super Mario Kart* so great – the fact that a single red shell or well-timed lightning strike can turn a race completely upside down and have you screaming at the screen (or at a mate) in triumph, humiliation or disbelief.

Super Mario Kart was a landmark game for Nintendo, for the SNES and for videogaming itself, and in the eyes of much of the retro community it has never been equalled by any subsequent effort. The sublime courses remain the epitome of 2D track design and the game's infuriating and addictive fusion of skill and luck remains entirely addictive. Making it to *games™*'s readers' number one is a further accolade to add to its extensive collection of praise.

SHORT CUT

Another of *Super Mario Kart*'s best-remembered features was its multitude of jammy short cuts. With the aid of a feather or a mushroom, the game could be exploited to such a degree that 'fastest time' tables in magazines around the world deteriorated into farce with players exploiting bugs to get sub-five-second lap times. Done properly, though, there was nothing more satisfying than the perfectly executed *Super Mario Kart* short cut – landing on that thin beam in Ghost Valley 1 in order to take first on the last lap is a matter of sublime skill, make no mistake about that.



DEFINING MOMENT

Rainbow Road! It's just brilliant. Much sweat, many tears and many broken controllers after your very first go, you finally hit Rainbow Road at the end of the illustrious Special Cup – a course that was exceptionally long, exceptionally twisty and exceptionally harsh. None of its subsequent iterations have come anywhere near to equalling the difficulty of this original Rainbow Road and it's as satisfying to race now as it was all those years ago.

WEIRD DREAMS



WEIRD DREAMS

1. Suggestion of or reference to the supernatural, the occult, the strange or bizarre. 2. A picture of something that is not real.

WEIRD DREAMS

1. Mental activity, usually in the form of ideas, images, or feelings, occurring during certain phases of sleep. 2. A picture of something that is not real.

WEIRD DREAMS

WEIRD DREAMS

WEIRD DREAMS

WEIRD DREAMS

WEIRD DREAMS is available from all good retailers. Commission Agents, April 81, and 1984 price £24.99. Commission 10% plus £0.00.



RAINBIRD

Developed and designed by Rainbird and Tony King. Artwork by Martin Wright, James Hutchins and Tony King. UNIT 7, HAMPTON ROAD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, WITBURN, LANC. BB11 1JH. 0666 504124.

WEIRD DREAMS [Various] Rainbird, 1989 – Original UK Advert

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

Collectors!

If you have a gaming collection worthy of these pages then get in touch with gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk

THIS MONTH WE JOURNEY TO THE NETHERLANDS TO HOOK UP WITH ERIK VOSKUIL AND TAKE A GANDER AT HIS HIGHLY IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION ENCOMPASSING EVERYTHING NINTENDO – FROM EARLY PLASTIC TOYS TO A HUGE ARRAY OF CONSOLES FROM THE MIGHTY NES TO THE LESSER LOVED VIRTUAL BOY...



Q: When did your Nintendo obsession start?

EV: I prefer to call it 'an interest', although it may go a tad beyond that... Okay, I admit it, it's an obsession. It started gradually. I've always been into electro-mechanical and electronic entertainment devices. Pinball machines, jukeboxes and all sorts of arcade machines. When *Donkey Kong* appeared in 1981, it struck me as very original, and I switched to it from playing *Pac-Man* (which had been munching most of my change up to then). From that moment, 'How high can you get?' was on my mind for months.

Around the same time, I also picked up playing LCD games. From the deluge of handheld titles in the early Eighties, the Nintendo games really stood out. They looked cool, and the gameplay was fantastic. Next came the NES (*SMB3*), the Game Boy (*Tetris*, *Super Mario Land*) and the SNES (*Super Mario World*), and I discovered a clear constant in my videogame preferences. Nintendo.

I began importing games from Japan, and read about Nintendo's history. I learned that the company had existed for about a hundred years, and had been active in the toy business since the Sixties. A number of these toys that pre-date the 'videogame Nintendo' that we all know are designed by Gunpei Yokoi, who went on to create both the Game & Watch concept as well as the Game Boy (and the Virtual Boy). That further sparked my interest.

Having acquired most Nintendo items of interest since the Eighties, I went further back in time to search for items from the company's prehistory. As a collector, you come up with new quests to



keep yourself busy, but my main aim was to lay my hands on mystical things I had read about, like the Ultra Hand and the Ultra Machine.

By this time, I'd started travelling to Japan regularly and learned a little Japanese. My general interest in the country went hand-in-hand with the specific Nintendo obsession.

Q: What was the first item in your collection?

EV: My collection is around 20 years old. The first Nintendo item I bought was the double screen *Game & Watch Mario Bros* back in 1983, followed by *Green House*. That same year, I also got a Colecovision, primarily to play *Donkey Kong* at home, but I remember being disappointed when I discovered that one of the four levels had been chopped. No pie factory. The horror.

Q: Where do you buy most of your stuff?

EV: At first, I bought everything from local game stores, but as my interest went beyond what was for sale there, I started mail ordering things directly from the US, Hong Kong and Japan. These days, it's well-known online stores (Lik-Sang, Play-Asia), auction sites (eBay, Yahoo Japan), and shopping sprees in Japan. I'm also lucky to have met some great folks in Japan, who've helped find many of the rarer pieces.

Q: What's your most treasured item?

EV: That's like asking a father of ten children to name his favourite. Still, if I must, then it's a toss up between two recently acquired items. First, there's



◀ Gunpei Yokoi's Virtual Boy takes pride of place among a veritable sea of games consoles.

▼ Clearly a proud collector, Eric has filled display cabinets with his gaming treasures.



the Famicom 20th Anniversary Game Boy Advance from 2003 which I won in a prize draw for members of Club Nintendo Japan. It combines the nostalgic feel of the Famicom with a Game Boy Advance SP. And second, I have a good-as-new Ultra Hand from 1966, which was actually the first Nintendo product designed by Gunpei Yokoi.

Q: What's your favourite Mario game?

EV: A tie between *Super Mario World* and *Super Mario 64*. With a gun against my head, I'd go for *SMW* because of the brilliant and fluent way you played both Mario and Yoshi. And did I mention Mario's cape? On the other hand, I recall the first few hours with the N64's controller and *Super Mario 64* as pure gaming bliss.

Q: And your favourite non-Nintendo item?

EV: The Sega Genesis CDX – a neat little console. I used it to play all the great *Sonic* games as well as the Sega CD Lunar games, so it represents some fond memories.

Q: Which console is closest to your heart?

EV: Definitely the SNES/Super Famicom. Why? Well, *Super Mario World*, *Yoshi's Island*, *Zelda: A Link to The Past*, *Final Fantasy VI*, *Chrono Trigger*, *Secret Of Mana*, *Super Mario All Stars*, need I say more?

Q: Here's the biggie: favourite game ever?

EV: That's the hardest question. I can easily pick a favourite game for every year I've been playing

videogames. But – with apologies to the developers of all those games I think are fantastic – I pick *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. Superbly designed from start to finish. The most engrossed I've ever been in a game was with *Shenmue*. I couldn't stop playing it, and started mixing up real and in-game virtual time. For weeks, I dreamt about driving around on a forklift. *Dreamcast* indeed.

Q: What item is missing from your collection?

EV: That would be *Virtual Bowling* for the Virtual Boy. It would complete my set of Virtual Boy games. The reason I don't have it yet is down to one thing. Money. It's just ridiculously expensive.

Q: Do you actually play all your consoles or are they just for display?

EV: Stuff from the Seventies and early Eighties: not regularly. But anything from the NES onwards gets a regular spin. I play all the games I buy. I'm not a collector with stacks of unplayed and sealed games. I used to spend many hours playing games, and was a dedicated completist (96 levels, 120 stars, etc). But family life, other interests and the resulting lack of time mean I now only 'sample' most games. I have more fun keeping up with new releases, rather than finishing games but playing only a few. Games do still regularly come along that I just have to finish. These days, though, most of my game time is spent playing *Mario Party* with my five year-old daughter.

Q: Roughly, how much have you spent on your obsession... sorry, hobby so far?

EV: I've never calculated that, and would probably be shocked if I did. In short: a lot. I buy most consoles on launch day, and new game releases when they come out. Also, the condition of the game and box is important for me. It has to be MIB, so a bargain hunter I am not.

Over the years, I've developed a sixth sense for items that are on the brink of becoming collectable, and rarely pay more than the original selling price. On a number of occasions, I've bought multiple copies of games, usually during the end of a console's lifecycle, and made a nice profit selling these a few years on (things like *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for the Saturn, and no, I don't have any copies left). Profit that was ploughed back into the collection, of course.

Q: Finally, looking to the future, what are your thoughts on Nintendo's Revolution console?

EV: It's intriguing. I'm not afraid that it's just a gimmick, as I have a very firm belief in Nintendo's power to come up with well thought through innovations. With controllers especially, its track record is unsurpassed. Recently it did it again with the *Made In Wario* motion sensitive game, and I also really like the DS touch screen (*Kirby: Canvas Curse*). And even if it's not a breakthrough, at least it'll be different to what Sony and Microsoft are doing.



▼ Nintendo was around long before videogames.



▼ 1 March 1997, the day the N64 entered our lives. Joy.



Share your views about
old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and there's something you'd like to share with the world, why not write to us at: **games™ Retro Contact**, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EQ. Or email: gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk.

RETRO WEARINESS

Dear games™,

Help – I'm bored of retro. I picked up a Taito classics collection the other day for a bargain price, but when I took it home I was shocked to find that nothing on it evoked anything like the fond nostalgia that retro games usually instil in me. Instead, I found myself getting increasingly frustrated with the sheer primitiveness of games I used to love, and switching it off within half an hour. Please, help me find a way to regain the love.

Dominic Saville

Oh dear, Dominic, you are in a pickle. There's no denying that titles such as *Bubble Bobble*, *The New Zealand Story* and *Zoo Keeper* don't look stunning by today's standards, but you're missing out if you feel these games are primitive. Still, this has happened to all of us at some point, and thankfully most people find that 'retro fatigue' just goes away with time.

DS REMAKES WANTED

Dear games™,

Am I the only person in the world who's disappointed by the lack of Nintendo 64 remakes on the Nintendo DS? I know everybody complained incessantly about the number of SNES ports on the Game Boy Advance, but I absolutely loved them, and to be honest, I've always wanted to be able to play all my old favourites while on the bus. I really enjoyed *Super Mario 64 DS* and I'd much rather see the return of *Snowboard Kids*, *Jet Force Gemini*, *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* and all my other old favourites than 'play' bloody

Nintendogs. Do you think that there is there any chance that this will happen?

Tina Enticknap

You know what, Tina, we're actually in two minds about this. If you look at earlier ports of games such as *Ridge Racer DS*, *Rayman DS* and even *Super Mario Bros. DS* they all lost something in their translation to Nintendo's handheld, and it's quite possible that others could follow suit. On the other hand, we'd love the chance to get to grips with portable versions of *Blast Corps*, *Space Station Silicon Valley* and *GoldenEye*. We'll have to see what happens.

CAN'T PLEASE EVERYBODY

Dear games™,

I can barely contain my indignation at your recent '100 Greatest Retro Games' countdown, and you've only published the first 50. *Majora's Mask*? *Jet Set Radio*? *Perfect Dark*? Not only are these games CLEARLY not old enough for a 'retro' top 100, they are being judged against

things like *Chuckie Egg* and *Skool Daze* which are immeasurably less sophisticated. Games from 2001 and from the early Eighties cannot possibly be judged on level ground. What possible criteria could you or your readers judge such dissimilar games by in order to put them into a 'definitive list'? I fail to see the point in running such a feature – surely it can't fail to incense any true retro fan.

Ed Sarrik

Well, this is the main problem

Ed: everyone has his or her own interpretation of what defines a retro game. Just as one man's meat is another man's poison, one person's *Jet Set Willy* is another's *Ocarina Of Time*. The 100 was to see what you, the readers, love playing – nothing more, nothing less. As for not being able to judge games because they're from different eras, that's just silly. Titles like *OutRun*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Gunstar Heroes* remain as fresh now as when they were first released. Admittedly, we might not agree with all the placings for the Top 100, but it's your chart, not ours.



GoldenEye in portable form? These are the ideas dreams are made of.



Nintendo big man Shigeru Miyamoto initially wanted Kirby to be yellow!

STAR LETTER

EASTERN PROMISE

Dear games™,

After years of just good intentions, I have finally got round to learning a little Japanese in my (relative) old age. And that's what got me to thinking, 'what can I do to continue my fascination of quirky eastern culture'?

Well, I've always been interested in kooky and attractive retro games, so perhaps I can put my new-found language to use and search out some videogame goodness from the Land of the Rising Sun. So, games™, I'm looking to you to suggest a few Japan-only titles with which to grace my ever-expanding retro collection. I'm especially keen to find Japanese versions of old consoles because they cost next to nothing these days. Unfortunately, my knowledge

of pre-Dreamcast Japanese gaming is very limited, so perhaps you could recommend something on the SNES, Mega Drive or Saturn?

Sarah Ormiston

Well, Sarah, if you're looking for SNES titles, you can't go wrong with *Umihara Kawase*, which is a delightful little platformer featuring a girl with a rubber rope. If your Japanese is a little better, then why not try a role-playing game that never made it to the UK such as *Bahamut Lagoon*. The Saturn had a lot of great shoot-'em-ups such as *Radiant Silvergun* and *Batsugan*, while the Mega Drive had titles ranging from *Rainbow Islands* to *Gley Lancer*. If you want more advice head on over to an import-friendly site such as ntsc-uk.com.



Zzap! 64 magazine had a cult following among C64 owners.

it mostly depends on personal preference and the machines you had access to. In general, the glory days of gaming are generally thought to have been in the late Seventies and early Eighties (just before the great video crash). As for our own personal preference... you'll just have to keep guessing.

RETRO CLASSICS

Dear games™,

How about a feature on retro magazines? I'm sure many of your readers would enjoy a good retrospective on *Crash*, *Amiga Power*, *Super Play*, *Zzap!64* and other such classic mags – they're about as important to many retro culture aficionados as the actual games were, after all. I know games™ is all about the games, but a little bit of retro culture wouldn't go amiss.

Roy Asnard

Ooh, do you know what, just mentioning those magazines brings back fond memories for us, but what about the likes of *Mean Machines*, *Amstrad Action*, *Computer & Video Games* and *Arcade*, to mention a few. This is definitely something we'll look into for future reference, though.

BRING BACK KIRBY

Dear games™,

Whatever happened to Kirby? He's not had a game since *Air Ride* (the less said about that the better), and games™'s Retro section seems to have forgotten he ever existed. I would love to see a big feature on some of his classics in this magazine in the near future. Please help prevent the loveable pink blob from sinking forever into obscurity, and do a feature on *Kirby's Dream Course* or one of the *Dream Land* games.

Angelo Burke

You're absolutely right, Angelo, the lovable pink blob does seem to have gone into hiding recently. Maybe a family tree of classic Kirby games is in order. Watch this space...

THE GOOD OL' DAYS

Dear games™,

In your opinion, when was the golden era of videogames? During an animated discussion with a few friends, I found that the only thing we could agree on was that at some point gaming must have been better than now – but none of us could agree when this period was. Personally, I think the refined 2D perfection of the SNES was the best gaming's ever been, but my friends champion the formative and explosive 8-bit era or even the PSOne/N64 period as the golden age. I'm starting to doubt there even was a golden age. Surely, if it had existed we'd all be able to agree when it was.

T Harsnip

Ah, that age-old question once again. As we've mentioned on countless occasions,

Video Game Centre

Retro Contact is sponsored by Video Game Centre, import and retro specialists for 14 years. Each month's Star Letter will win its author a retro game of their choice worth up to £40

Call for info on **+44(0)1202 527314** or visit our website **VideoGameCentre.co.uk**



C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

BUYERS' GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying...

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£40-£60
Goldstar 3DO	£45-£60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£15-£25
Acorn Electron	£10-£25

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-£25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-£25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25-£50
Amstrad GX4000	£20-£60



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£20-£35
Atari ST	£20+ (depending on model)
Atari Lynx	£15+ (depending on model)
Atari Jaguar	£20

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic20	£10-£30
Commodore 64	£10-£30
Commodore Amiga	£20+ (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£20-£50
C64 GS	£30-£50
Commodore CD32	£25-£50



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£1-£200 (depending on model)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-£20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£5-£10
Game Boy Color	£10-£15
Super Nintendo	£20-£40
Virtual Boy	£80-£100
Nintendo 64	£10-£25

SEGA

Master System	£10-£30 (depending on model)
Mega Drive	£10-£20
Game Gear	£15-£25
Mega CD	£40-£70 (depending on model)
Sega 32X	£35
Sega Nomad	£70-£140
Saturn	£30+ (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£25+ (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

ZX-81	£40-£70
ZX Spectrum 48K	£20-£50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70+ (depending on model)
Neo Geo AES (home System)	£150+
Neo Geo CD	£100+
Neo Geo CDZ	£80+
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£60-£200
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£150-£200
JAMMA Compatible cabinets	£100-£350
	(depending on model)
Super Gun	£120-£400 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£55-£70
Turbo Grafx-16	£30-£50
Turbo Duo	£120-£180
PC Engine GT	£70-£150
Super Grafx	£80 (prices can fluctuate)

Right then – you’ve just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you’re not too sure what to go for. Hopefully we can help. Every month we print the current prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change, so don’t be surprised if you manage to get one for less or, if you’re really unlucky, more. This month we’re casting our critical eye over some of the better Amstrad arcade conversions available.



Renegade

Estimated Price: £1-5
Publisher: Imagine Studios
Developer: Taito

Now, this is how you do an arcade conversion properly. While *Renegade* may not have been a particularly huge hit in the arcades, Mike Lamb’s superb adaptation certainly managed to win the acclaim of CPC (Colour Personal Computer) fans. The visuals looked incredible, the soundtrack was of an extremely high quality and, most importantly, the gameplay was spot on. There was even a cheat in place so you could turn the game’s blue blood red. Marvellous stuff.



Gryzor

Estimated Price: £1-4
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Konami

As with *Renegade*, *Gryzor* was a sterling example of how to successfully port an arcade game over to the humble Amstrad. The visual style was similar to the urban fighter, the weapon system was wonderfully elegant to use and, unlike the C64 version, you didn’t need a second button to make your marine jump. A great port that made many Spectrum and C64 owners extremely jealous. Now there’s a turn up for the books.



Chase HQ

Estimated Price: £1-4
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Taito

While not quite as good as the Spectrum version, there’s certainly no denying that *Chase HQ* boasted a superb Amstrad port, especially if you were fortunate enough to get your grubby mitts on the 128K version which featured some truly excellent digitised speech. Tearing through the varied landscapes and hammering the hell out of an escaping criminal car, proved just as much fun on the Amstrad as it was in the arcades. Let’s go, Mr Driver.



Solomon’s Key

Estimated Price: £8
Publisher: US Gold
Developer: Tecmo

Solomon’s Key may not have been one of the more popular arcade titles to appear on Alan Sugar’s 8-bit computer, but that only made the home conversions stand out even more. Sure, the tune could (and did) grate after a couple of stages, but the meticulously designed levels, ample array of enemies and perfect blend between puzzle and platforming action was more than enough to keep you going back for more.



Combat School

Estimated Price: £1-4
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Konami

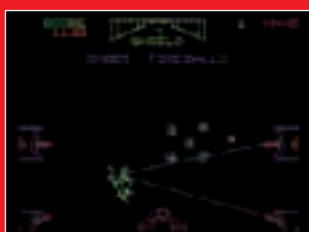
You know, it’s very easy to look back and criticise Ocean for its lazy film and TV tie-ins, but when it wanted to be, it was a developer that could turn out some cracking arcade titles. While the Amstrad version of *Combat School* had to get by without the superb C64 remix of *I Wanna Be Your Drill Instructor*, it featured superior visuals, gripping gameplay and plenty of arm-tiring joystick-wagglng events to get stuck into. Your arms may never be the same again.



Star Wars

Estimated Price: £5
Publisher: Domark
Developer: Atari

It may not have had the speed of its bigger brother, but Domark’s version of *Star Wars* was still pretty damned good and went down a storm upon its release. The simple wire-frame graphics looked great, and while it lacked the cool speech of the arcade game, the all-important gameplay survived the transition intact. Another great conversion that proved the Amstrad was more than capable of holding its own against the 8-bits.



Rainbow Islands

Estimated Price: £1-7
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Taito

Rainbow Islands is one of the most successfully converted arcade games of all time, with practically every machine receiving a spot-on version. The Amstrad edition was particularly good and featured a great rendition of the game’s soundtrack, glorious chunky visuals that captured the cheerful look of its arcade parent and the same hectic gameplay that had made *Bubble Bobble*’s sequel such a success. A cracking conversion of a spectacular game.



Tempest

Estimated Price: £2-5
Publisher: Electric Dreams
Developer: Mastertronic

Considering the Amstrad version of *Tempest* didn’t feature a trackball of any sort, it did a surprisingly good job at matching the speed, accuracy and franticness of Atari’s hit arcade game. The simple gameplay and stark visuals of the original meant *Tempest*’s developer didn’t have to worry about recreating superb visuals and could simply concentrate on bettering the gameplay. The end result couldn’t have been better.



HI-ENTERTAINMENT
GAME SERIES



感覚最先端、
スーパーローリングインパクト!!

R360

よりエキサイティングなゲーム空間と、より高度なシミュレーション体験を実現したハイ・エンターテインメントマシンR360。前後、左右360度の無制限回転が可能とする本機体のアミューズメントシーンは、先進性とクオリティの高い娯楽でプレイヤーの全層を包み込みます。

EXPERIENCE THE ULTIMATE SENSATION AS YOU FEEL THE FULL IMPACT OF SEGA'S R360 SUPER ROLLING SIMULATOR!

The R360 takes a new dimension, and brings maximum sophistication to coin-op simulators. Abundant with state-of-the-art features, it introduces a new era in rollercoasters which allows the player to experience the thrill of riding in a cockpit that revolves 360 degrees in all directions - back & forth, and right & left.

SEGA

R360 [Arcade] Sega, 1991 - Original UK Advert



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £104.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PS2 is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

PSP

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 1 September 2005
Media UMD Disc **Current Price** £179.99



The PSP is a beautiful piece of hardware and its games portfolio has strengthened enormously in the months following the European release. Its gorgeous design and capability to play UMD movies has made it a huge success outside the traditional gaming market, too. Although it's very expensive for a handheld, its multimedia features justify the price.

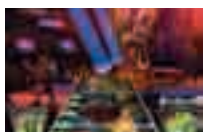
TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi
Dragon Quest VIII	IMPORT Sony	Level-5
God Of War	Sony	In-House
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Guitar Hero	IMPORT Red Octane	Harmonix
Ico	SCEE	In-House
Makai Kingdom	Koei	Nippon Ichi
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House
Rez	Sega	UGA
Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	In-House
Soul Calibur III	Sony	Namco
SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House
We Love Katamari	Namco	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Guitar Hero

■ The power of rock is an incredible force. Now everyone can experience it with the help of a little plastic guitar.



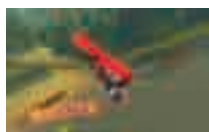
Soul Calibur III

■ Will it ever get any better? Can it, indeed? We're still playing this, and it's been months and months now.



SSX On Tour

■ We thought we had extreme sports fatigue until this game came along and reminded us just how fun it is to hurtle down mountains.



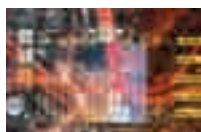
TWENTY MUST-HAVE PSP GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Ridge Racer	Sony	Namco
Lumines	Ubisoft	Q Entertainment
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	In-House
Ape Academy	Sony	In-House
Virtua Tennis	Sega	Sumo Digital
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
WipEout Pure	Sony	In-House
Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Exit	Ubisoft	Taito
Tokobot	2K Games	Tecmo
WWE Smackdown! 2006	THQ	Yuke's
Pursuit Force	Sony	In-House
Madden NFL 2006	Electronic Arts	In-House
NFL Street Unleashed	Electronic Arts	In-House
NBA Street Showdown	Electronic Arts	In-House
Untold Legends	Activision	SOE
Metal Gear AcId	Konami	In-House
PQ	D3	Now Production
Mercury	Sony	Awesome Studios
Mega Man Powered Up	Capcom	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Lumines

■ Tetsuya Mizuguchi's puzzler is a mixture of Rez and Tetris; all hypnotic beats and dazzling lights. Fiendishly addictive.



WipEout Pure

■ Breathtaking visuals and the smoothest racing since 2097, WipEout Pure was the pick of the PSP launch titles.



Pro Evolution Soccer 5

■ It may have its faults – slowdown and dodgy controls – but very little beats scoring a 30-yard volley on the train.





EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 13 March 2002
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £99.99



Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the recent release of the Xbox 360, Microsoft will be supporting the console until at least 2007.

XBOX 360

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 2 December 2005
Media 4.5-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £279.99



The Xbox 360 hasn't been around for long, but has already made a huge impact on the industry and become the fastest-selling console in UK history, despite that enormous price tag. Although we can't help feeling that the best is still to come, the Xbox 360's myriad Live functions and decent selection of first-wave titles make it worth sampling right now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE
Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Criterion Studios
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

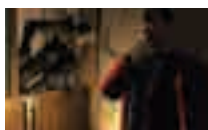
OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast
 ■ Sublimely beautiful racing that manages to both thrill and relax us at the same time. Those lovely sunsets...



Fahrenheit
 ■ Okay, the ending is ridiculous, but there's still nothing else quite like this out there, and it deserves recognition.



Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory
 ■ Sam Fisher's darkest expedition yet is nastier than previous versions. We hate to say it benefits from added violence, but it's certainly different.

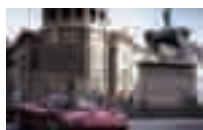


TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX 360 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Infinity Ward
Condemned: Criminal Origins	Sega	Monolith
Dead Or Alive 4	Microsoft	Tecmo
Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	In-House
Amped 3	2K Sports	In-House
Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	In-House
Full Auto	Sega	Pseudo Interactive
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	Rare
Perfect Dark Zero	Microsoft	Rare
NBA 2K6	2K Sports	In-House
Quake 4	Activision	id Software
Ridge Racer 6	Electronic Arts	Namco
Gun	Activision	Neversoft
Marble Blast Ultra	Live Arcade	Garage Games Inc
Geometry Wars 2	Live Arcade	Bizarre Creations
FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	In-House
Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII	Ubisoft	In-House
King Kong	Ubisoft	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Project Gotham Racing 3
 ■ The finest pure racing experience available in videogame form – essential in every way.



Fight Night Round 3
 ■ Stunning looks, deep gameplay and knockouts that will undoubtedly make your girlfriend cry.



Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter
 ■ Gritty urban warfare featuring heart-attack levels of tension. Looks incredible to boot.



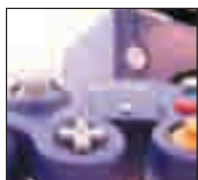
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 3 May 2002

Media 3-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £79.99



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle up against the other consoles, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth taking a look at. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

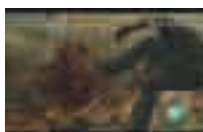
TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House
Alien Hominid	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth
Chibi-Robo	Nintendo	Skip
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House
Killer7	Capcom	In-House
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Resident Evil 4

■ Still astonishingly brilliant, *Resident Evil 4* is the best game in the series by a long way in our opinion.



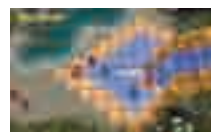
Pikmin 2

■ We love Pikmin, we really do. Listen to their little songs of triumph as they carry the spoils away from a successful fight.



Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance

■ A perfect home-console *Fire Emblem* with a slightly cheap look that belies its complexity. Well worth a purchase.



DS

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 11 March 2005

Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £89.99



Chances are, you'll either already be completely in love with Nintendo's newest handheld or you'll have hated it from the start. The DS has dismissed misconceptions about it being nothing more than a gimmick by giving us a number of excellent games over the past year, and its affordability and accessibility have given it a sizeable advantage over the PSP.

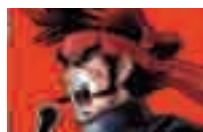
TWENTY MUST-HAVE DS GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Nintendogs	Nintendo	In-House
Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	In-House
Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	In-House
Advance Wars: Dual Strike	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Lost In Blue	Konami	In-House
Sonic Rush	Sega	In-House
Zoo Keeper	Ignition Entertainment	Success
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Nintendo	Capcom
Kirby: Power Paintbrush	Nintendo	HAL Labs
Mario And Luigi: Partners In Time	Nintendo	In-House
Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Atlus	Atlus
Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	Clover
Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	Fuse Games Ltd
Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!	Nintendo	Inis
Daigasso! Band Brothers	Nintendo	In-House
Tony Hawk's American Sk8land	Activision	Vicarious Visions
Meteos	Nintendo	Q Entertainment
Yoshi Touch And Go	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Touch	Nintendo	In-House
Another Code	Nintendo	Jinx

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!

■ This cheerleading bemani gem has proved a massive hit with importers. Possibly the finest DS game available.



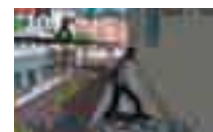
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney

■ Objection! A fine little adventure full of character, and suitably different to almost everything else.



Tony Hawk's American Sk8land

■ A super-smooth version of Tony and his world of skateboarding, with a pretty cel-shaded style. An unexpected, pleasant surprise.





EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001

Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games can be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours, while the even more diminutive Micro is also out to buy now.

PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A

Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics and other special effects.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

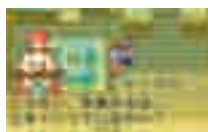
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Movies	Activision	Lionhead Studios
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django
■ It's nearly summer again (sort of) and the sun's coming out. If you love the series, this is as good as solar gaming gets.

Mario Golf: Advance Tour
■ A brilliant golf RPG unlike anything else (except the Game Boy Color version). The hours we put in to it can't be normal.

Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town
■ The brilliant For Girls version is out now on import. There's more cooking and you get to pick up men.

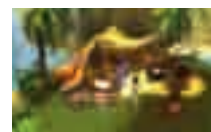


WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

City Of Heroes/Villains
■ Now that NCsoft's superhero RPG world is complete, it's even easier to get lost in. Curse you, monthly subscriptions.

The Movies
■ Amazing, plus you get to stage any production you like. None will be as good as our Monkey Vs Robot In The Rain, though.

Ankh
■ Point-and-click adventures aren't dead, as this excellent title proves. Funny, challenging and packed with nostalgic love.



PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

JOYTECH XBOX 360 NEO SE ADVANCED CONTROLLER

Console: Xbox 360
From: Joytech
Price: £19.99
Available: Now

PLAY WITH FRIENDS!

Most of those that were left wanting a 360 over the festive season should have obtained a machine by now and started enjoying the benefits of the next generation of Live play. However, there are still those that prefer to play with friends situated in the same room, and for this you're going to need a second pad. For all the rumours of poor quality, third-party controllers, there are a number of good products available to those not wishing to splash out on official merchandise and Joytech's Xbox 360 Neo Se Advanced Controller is such an item. Weighing in at a whole £5 cheaper than the official version, this controller not only features a more defined D-pad, but also sports the Start and Select buttons to the far-left of the pad where roving oversized digits can't club them accidentally. That's not to say it's masher proof, though.



JOYTECH DIGITAL AV SCART CABLE

Console: Xbox 360
From: Joytech
Price: £14.99
Available: Now

AN ESSENTIAL EXTRA

As nice as it is to have the future here already, some have suggested that the next generation of consoles has arrived a little too soon. Sure we all enjoy looking at the latest in visual superiority, but many of us lack a television worthy of such greatness and are still relying on tired, old, 'we wish it were HD' technology to view games on. For these people, RGB SCART remains the most common way to get the best picture, but as neither the Core nor value 360 pack comes with the cable, you'll best want to nip out and buy yourself one at a reasonable price. Fortunately, this is exactly what Joytech is offering and, although it's hard to get excited about a cable, this one works well and is reasonably priced – a combination we like lots.



JOYTECH XBOX 360 FACEPLATES: TWIN PACKS

Console: Xbox 360
From: Joytech
Price: £14.99
Available: Now

FANCY A NEW LOOK?

Looks aren't everything. It's something that we're taught throughout our entire lives, and being obsessed with minor cosmetic changes is only likely to bring about people speaking of skin-deep beauty and the unfortunate affliction that is shallowness. Of course, these rules go out the window when talking of consoles. They need to look sleek, smart and as sexy as possible, and if a faceplate is going to aid this in any way then count us in. True enough, in time you'll probably be able to have whatever you like gracing the front of your 360 for minimal coinage, but until those days arrive these twin packs are a fair way cheaper than official Microsoft plates and stand a reasonable chance of containing a design that matches your curtains and/or carpet.







NEXT MONTH IN **GAMES™**

games™ takes
the plunge into
Oblivion. Will we
survive the fall?

ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

180

PAGES OF
OPEN-ENDED
GAMING

NEXT MONTH



Electronic Arts goes ahead and makes us an offer we can't refuse.

MORE... REVIEWS

As the number of essential 360 titles increases, we will be examining 2K Games' epic offering: *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and delivering the all-important verdict next month. With EA's adaptation of *The Godfather*, Capcom's *Final Fight Streetwise* and *Metroid Prime Hunters* finally making it to the DS, it's shaping up to be a busy month for reviews.

"THE GODFATHER PUSHES FREE ROAMING INTO NEW TERRITORY"



Fisher take a brief hiatus from sneaking for an abseiling holiday in Dover.

MORE... PREVIEWS

E3 is rapidly approaching, but be in no doubt that **games™** will be wrapping up all the pre-show game preview news with the usual depth and accuracy that you have come to expect. Sam Fisher's latest outing receives a **games™** grilling, and we'll also be paying the monkeys a visit in Sega's *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*.

"GONGON IS THE SON OF A PIRATE"



This fellow plays far too many games. Find out just how many next month.

MORE... FEATURES

With Xbox Live Arcade and gamer scores being the current hot topic in console gaming, we thought it high time to investigate just what makes this aspect of online gaming so fascinating. Couple this with a discussion on the convergence between comic books and videogames, and there'll be plenty of food for thought next issue.

ON SALE 20 APRIL '06

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF **games™**

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not...

I SEEM TO be one of the fortunate few who actually managed to get his mitts on an Xbox 360, and it was with trembling hands that I opened my brand new copy of *Call Of Duty 2*. I love a good war game, but while there is much to like about this one I was left feeling strangely underwhelmed. We all bore the brunt of Microsoft's marketing campaign, and after repeatedly seeing such gorgeous images in TV programmes and adverts I couldn't help but feel that the actual game's visuals were not up to the same standard. When I saw the adverts again on television I realised that what I was seeing wasn't what I had played on the console. Is there something to this, or did fevered anticipation cloud my judgement?

Leo Ryman

games™: What with all the hyperbole about the graphical capabilities of the next-generation consoles, you'd think that developers would put their money where their mouths are when it comes to the advertising. Not so. It seems that the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has received several complaints regarding the difference in graphical quality between *Call Of Duty 2* the game and *Call Of Duty 2* the advert. Activision has argued that while the graphics used in the advert were superior to those featured in the game, this is accepted practice within the industry, and the company was unaware that it would be frowned upon. While this is almost certainly true, the ASA is concerned that such practices deliberately mislead the consumer and have banned the adverts until the offending images have been replaced.

The decision will no doubt set an important precedent for game developers accustomed to using the tactic when marketing new titles – and trust us, there are plenty of them.

WHAT ON EARTH is it with the modern obsession for making everything small? The newest mobile phones look like little more than slivers of tin foil while Microsoft seems committed to shrinking the iPod until we can't even see it, let alone buy it. Now I hear news of the Nintendo DS Lite, a smaller version of an already decent piece of kit with no obvious motivating factors beyond extracting more money from people like me. You don't need to be as grumpy as me to see that this is a ridiculous notion. It's not like the original DS was enormous.

Fred Higgs

games™: First up, Fred, your role in this game we call commerce is as a consumer, and whether you like the idea of these constant product variations or not, you don't actually have to buy them all. Secondly, the DS Lite is intended as a replacement, not as an alternative. The old-style DS will gradually disappear until the Lite version is all that remains, so it's more a case of Nintendo evolving the design than shamelessly cashing in on it. Sony and Microsoft are completely dominating the console wars, so Nintendo seems to be making the smart move and solidifying its position in the handheld market, and with the DS boasting some of the most innovative titles out there, that can't be a bad thing. Can it?

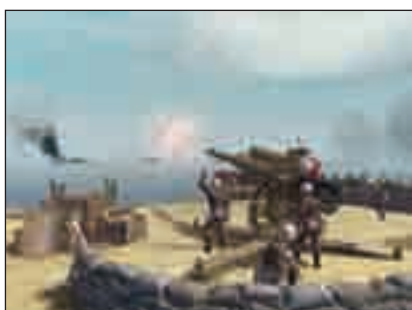
Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with **games™**. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EQ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk

"WHAT'S THIS MODERN OBSESSION WITH MAKING EVERYTHING SMALL? MICROSOFT SEEMS COMMITTED TO SHRINKING THE IPOD UNTIL WE CAN'T EVEN SEE IT LET ALONE BUY IT. IT'S NOT LIKE THE DS WAS ENORMOUS"



■ *Call Of Duty 2* it's like women. You see one that looks nice, you get it home, and it's never quite as good as you thought it would be.

☐ **I'M AN AVID** gamer and I pride myself on knowing a thing or two about what's going on, and until yesterday I was all set on resisting the Xbox 360 in favour of the much more exciting PlayStation3. Now that I hear reports that Sony's production costs are so high that it's losing money on every one it makes, my head is filled with concerns. How much is it losing? Will this affect the launch price? Will software and peripheral costs be increased to cover the losses? And last, but by no means least, should I just give in and buy the Xbox 360 instead?

Ian Curtin

games™: There has certainly been an abundance of reports on this subject, Ian, but the actual figure for the production cost varies from source to source – there have been numerous suggestions, everything from \$300 to \$800. Such wild inconsistencies would suggest that most of the rumours will be just that and nothing more, but there's no smoke without fire and it seems clear that Sony is making some sort of loss. How this will affect the launch price isn't clear – along with almost everything surrounding the PlayStation3 – but it's unlikely that Sony will increase prices post-launch and risk alienating those that were good enough to buy the console in the first place. Production costs will decrease quickly once the PS3 is established, and Sony has



■ The new dinky DS. We've held, it we've played, we love it. Remember, you are not compelled to buy one, but you'll probably want to.

deep enough pockets to cover its losses until the profits start rolling in. As to what you should buy: the Xbox 360 is here, its strengths and weaknesses available for all to see, while the PlayStation3 remains a tantalising mystery. So what would you rather – the dream, or the sure thing?

☐ **IT SEEMS TO** me that with all this uncertainty surrounding the launch date of the PlayStation3, and with no fixed idea of exactly what it contains or what it will be able to do, Microsoft has its work cut out for the success of the Xbox 360. I was PlayStation3 mad to begin with, but all these conflicting reports and vague suggestions got the better of me and I went ahead and bought a 360 yesterday. I mean how long does a girl have to wait for the next generation to arrive? The PlayStation3 may well be the ultimate entertainment experience, but it isn't here yet, and the 360 is likely to tempt quite a few more people besides me, I'm sure.

Sally Jessop

games™: We have to agree that now the farcical supply problems have been eradicated and boxes upon boxes of 360s are filling up the shelves in stores, the indefinite wait for the PS3 is starting to look like something of a chore. But seriously, let's face it, the



CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF **games™**

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

□ Can I get a 360 yet?

g™: Yes, you can. We walked into the local GAME store today and saw them lighting up the shelves.

□ Where is your website?

g™: Don't fret, the site will be back up soon, and better than ever, we can assure you.

□ The 360 is better than the DS.

g™: Fantastic analysis. Give us your details, and you can have a job. [Kidding.]

□ Why won't you give me your office gamertag? Pleeese.

g™: You really have to stop doing this now. We're not going to give you it because, to be perfectly honest, we're scared.

□ I invented a new word: Woogins.

g™: We're very proud of you. And we're still not giving you our gamertag.

□ Why can't I buy We Love Katamari?

g™: It's had a very limited release because no one thinks it will sell. Well, it definitely won't if people can't actually buy it.

□ Where have you been?

g™: Aya Napa. Listening to UK Garage. Playing FIFA Street. It was rubbish.

□ I'm better than you at Guitar Hero.

g™: You'd like to think so. You're not, though. Are you?

□ DS Lite looks wikkid!

g™: Yes. Now there are FIVE ways to play you GBA games. Woogins.



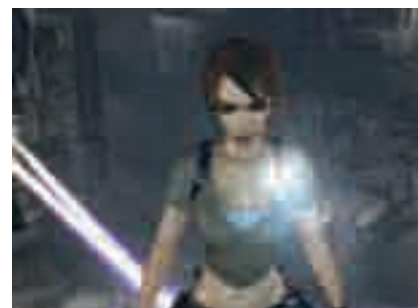
■ Take a moment to remember the Dreamcast's *Shenmue*, a forgotten treasure.

PlayStation3 probably will be amazing and you'll just end up buying one of those too. Fine, if that's what you were planning anyway, but your bank manager may not take kindly to such reckless expenditure. Our advice: if you're a PS3 devotee stay the course for just a little while longer, it may be worth your while.

□ **I'M A STUDENT** and spend the majority of my free time eating pasta and playing videogames. When not playing games, I'm constantly coming up with new ways to avoid spending money, and just recently I noticed something that got me quite excited (and no, it wasn't Des Lynam on *Countdown*). Walking through the supermarket last week, I was drawn to the console section where I encountered some absurdly cheap games for the PlayStation2. I hadn't heard of any of them so I steered clear, but later that day I saw many of the same games in a high-street game shop for similarly bargain prices. I'm always up for cheap games, but I'd really rather not buy anything crap, and I haven't seen any reviews for these titles in any magazines. Many of them seem to be Japanese in origin. How do I find out if they're worth buying?

Rob Meldrum

games™: These games are an example of a growing trend in games retail where

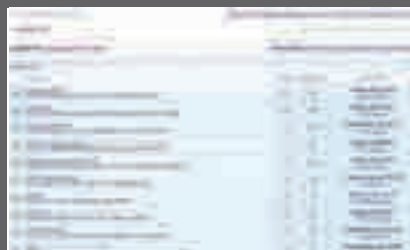


■ Will Lara Croft be taking her rightful place in the Great British Design hall of fame?

publishers scour foreign markets for old titles to release here at knockdown prices. One such prominent company is 505 GameStreet, which is turning into a great resource for cut-price Japanese weirdness. While we at **games™** do endeavour to cover such games where possible, you may still have trouble finding certain recommendations, so it might be useful for you to search on various game forums to find out what people are saying about the less mainstream games. It's worth investigating, as there are some real gems from way out east.

□ **WITH THE XBOX** and PlayStation2 making way for their shiny new counterparts, I got to thinking about the defining moment of the last 'next-generation' consoles. There were many highs to choose from, but for me the single most staggering moment was the first time I played *Shenmue* on... the Dreamcast. I know it all ended badly, but those early days were exciting times, and at the risk of sounding uncool the Dreamcast was responsible for the first time I realised what 'next generation' truly meant. What with the coming of a new era in videogaming, I think that it's high time we reassessed the passing one and gave a little credit to the much-maligned Dreamcast.

Paul Woolf



FROM THE FORUM

THE ART OF STORYTELLING

games™: Paul, you're walking a tightrope between idiocy and inspired, but we think you've just about pulled it off. Good point, sir, and well made. Do any other readers have a defining last-generation moment? Master Chief straddling a warthog? Mowing down civilians in *GTA: Liberty City Stories*? You send 'em; we'll print 'em.

JUST THOUGHT I'D write in and say how great it is to see *Grand Theft Auto* and *Tomb Raider* among the final 25 candidates for the Great British Design Award. This list could have been entirely full of lamps and wooden chairs, but instead this shows an impressive open-mindedness that I didn't think the Brits possessed. Just the thought of Lara Croft sandwiched between a Concorde and a map of The Tube has made me a very happy man indeed. Could this be the final proof that games are being accepted as art in their own right? It's about bloody time!

Dan Powell

games™: Thanks for the update, Dan, and we can't help but agree that this is most excellent news indeed. The cultural impact of Lara Croft and the sheer, mind-boggling scope of the *GTA* series are gaming milestones, and to have them recognised on a national level is a great triumph for the industry. As for the old videogames-as-art chestnut, well, these lists are the result of a public vote and are often riddled with fads and trends. If Lara and *GTA* are still challenging Concorde and the Mini in ten years' time, don't hesitate to call us. We'll talk.

"DEFINING MOMENT OF THE LAST GENERATION? FOR ME, THE MOST STAGGERING MOMENT WAS THE FIRST TIME I PLAYED SHENMUE ON THE DREAMCAST. I THINK IT'S TIME WE GAVE A LITTLE CREDIT TO THAT MUCH-MALIGNED CONSOLE"

I AM WRITING in response to Sally French's letter on *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* in issue 40. "Is there room for a little cynicism?" Well, no actually. The PSP is a new and challenging format, and *Liberty City Stories* is a typically superb game from Rockstar. Yes, so maybe it borrows a little from others titles in the series, but would Sally rather it didn't exist at all and we had two mediocre launch games in its place instead? After all, new pieces of hardware so seldom have decent titles right from the offing, and without this one the PSP line-up would look considerably worse. If *GTA: Liberty City Stories* was released for the PlayStation2, I could understand the concern, but there's nothing else like it on the PlayStation Portable and in my opinion we should just be glad we have access to something so downright accomplished.

Nathan Johnson

games™: Thanks for your input there, Nathan, and while we couldn't agree more that *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* is certainly one of the better PSP titles to have been released, we here at **games™** are staunch supporters of freedom of speech and so must give equal credit to Sally's opinion as well. The games industry is under constant threat of sinking into a dank hell of below-par sequels, remakes and licences. A little cynicism in the right places helps keep games developers on their toes, and we wouldn't really want it any other way. No game is above scrutiny, and Sally even began her letter commenting on how much she loved *Grand Theft Auto*. No doubt her copy is nearly as worn out as yours by now.



■ Mr Hangman

I've just suddenly thought, where have all the stories gone? With the insurgence of online gaming, has the story gone into decline? I've been playing online games, not even noticing the lack of story. *ICO*: the story was obvious, so I only played for the puzzles and the look. So is the story necessary anymore? What happened to it? Games these days tend to rely on gameplay and have terrible story lines. Any thoughts?

■ Jusatsushi

The most successful stories in games are built upon a premise rather than attempts to rival the latest Terry Pratchett and go all literary. *ICO* is protect the girl, *Colossus* is save the girl by killing the giants, and *Stranger's Wrath* is bounty farming. Subsequent developments work in games because they don't affect the mechanics of play, and are simple enough to become the mechanics of play.

Take *FFVII*. Now, I love that game, but I love it because it's fun to play. Okay, so it had some nice segments, but the plot as a whole would not have interested me were it a book or anime. And that's a plot widely considered to be among the best. It's not looking good is it?

■ toythatkills

I don't think the question should be 'where have the stories gone' so much as it should be 'when will the stories piss off?' Every game these days has a story tacked on; take the *Tony Hawk* games, for example. There's no need for the stories at all, and they're dire. With so many more games having pointless stories, it's no wonder that the 'good' stories get buried underneath it all now. It's just harder to find them these days.

Having said that, there's not a great deal a game can do story-wise. They cast you as a character that has an obstacle to overcome in order to save the world. There are only so many variations on that theme before you run out.

■ Windy

The story sections of *Disgaea* and a lot of games of this style are really only narratives to tie the battles together. If you want to see them in this way, that is. Other people may be enamoured with it where you might not be. *Disgaea* has a genuinely funny script, but it isn't there to be deep and thought provoking. The bits about reincarnation were quite good; it was done in a funny way.

It's all personal preference – like reading books of different genres. Games are the same, that's why there are so many. There is plenty of depth to be found in a lot of games I play, and to me a good story, which is often told just through conversation, can hold a game together.



games™